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# LEADING THE WAY:

Women-Led Localisation in Central Sulawesi:  
Towards Gender Transformative Action

September 2019



Local women are leading and distributing donated clothes in a coconut farm in Indonesia.

Credit: ActionAid

## Acknowledgements

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Cover photo: Rebuilding homes destroyed by the earthquake in Central Sulawesi. Credit: ActionAid

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Dewi, a medical volunteer, checks the blood pressure of 75-year-old Syamsul following the Indonesian earthquakes in September 2018.

Credit: Andri Tambunan/ActionAid

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### **Localisation and women's leadership in humanitarian action**

Ambitious plans to reform the humanitarian sector are still failing to meaningfully shift power and resources to local women and women-led organisations within humanitarian preparedness, response and recovery efforts. Despite commitments to localise humanitarian action, humanitarian actors, including donors, INGOs and United Nations agencies, continue to work in ways, which create financial, regulatory and cultural barriers that uphold exclusive patriarchal norms. These act to obstruct constructive and productive engagement, prevent fair representation and bottom up accountability and also stifle opportunities for innovation, learning and transformation across the humanitarian system, not least for women and girls.

Building on the extensive work of ActionAid and others, this research evidences, and advocates for, an approach to localisation which prioritises the leadership of local women and women-led organisations who have been overlooked, undervalued and under resourced in humanitarian

response to date, despite their unique contributions as first responders and long-term actors key to reduce the communities' vulnerabilities and inequalities.

ActionAid's definition of 'women-led localisation' highlights that localisation must be a transformative process which puts women and girls at its centre and values the significant role of women's leadership at a local level as part of humanitarian action. It also crucially acknowledges the multiple responsibilities that women face, including unpaid care work, and advocates for supportive and practical solutions to address these barriers.

Prioritising women's leadership is not only the right thing to do from a rights-based perspective, evidence and experience highlight that women and women-led organisations bring valuable skills and assets to localised humanitarian action. They are often able to gain access to hard-to-reach communities and those most marginalised within them, they bring a strong understanding of the local context and the needs and realities of women, girls and the community as a whole, and they offer crucial insight into how to engage with key stakeholders. If local women and women-led organisations are not supported to lead within localisation processes there is the risk that the needs of communities will not be met, and that their exclusion will reinforce structural inequalities and maintain the vulnerability of their communities.

## Women-led localisation in the Central Sulawesi response

In September 2018, a series of powerful earthquakes struck the Central Sulawesi province of Indonesia. This triggered a tsunami, which resulted in significant damage and loss of life across the affected districts of Palu, Donggala, Sigi and Parimo. The Indonesian government responded quickly to establish its leadership in the response, setting restrictions on the nature of international engagement and confirming that assistance would be channelled via national or local humanitarian partners. In many respects, this response marked a 'new' approach and way of working for the humanitarian sector, forcing international actors to rethink and reposition their roles. However, this strong commitment to localisation at a central government level did not translate into meaningful resource, support and representation for local women and women-led organisations operating on the ground in Central Sulawesi.

ActionAid's Indonesian entity, YAPPIKA-ActionAid, was one of the first organisations to establish its presence in Palu on the ground. Working with a selection of partners, including women-led organisations, YAPPIKA-ActionAid worked to identify and meet immediate needs in affected communities, especially those of women and girls. Drawing on learnings from these efforts, and in partnership with local women and women-led organisations, ActionAid undertook a piece of research to understand, within the unique parameters of the Central Sulawesi response, the challenges and opportunities for women-led localisation.

## Research findings

This research finds that despite limited visibility and acknowledgement within formal response efforts across actors working at a national and international level, diverse local women and women-led organisations were some of the first actors to mobilise and respond on the ground in Central Sulawesi. These individuals and organisations leveraged their trusted positions in communities, and existing connections and networks, to move quickly and effectively. They were able to provide key services for the community, including supporting evacuation processes and food and clothes distributions, acting as medical personnel and supporting school reconstruction. In addition, local women and women-led organisations played a critical role in identifying and supporting the specific and diverse needs of women and girls in the community. For example, in setting up and managing safe spaces (including Women Friendly Spaces and Women Friendly Tents), delivering psychosocial services and support, and creating opportunities for women and children to come together and share their

experiences and concerns. They have also played a key role in raising the profile of, and advocating on, key concerns with local authorities and implementing agencies.

Despite these widespread examples of women leading different activities as part of the humanitarian response and recovery processes in Central Sulawesi, this research identified several cross-cutting opportunities and challenges for women-led localisation in this context:

- Existing gender inequalities have been exacerbated and disrupted following the Central Sulawesi disaster. This has created both risk and opportunity.
- Formal decision-making structures and coordination mechanisms for the Central Sulawesi response continue to be dominated by men. However, some local women and women-led organisations have been able to assert influence in local decision-making spaces.
- Local women and women-led organisations have diverse skills, knowledge and networks that are an enormous asset in humanitarian preparedness, response and recovery work. Yet, a lack of 'humanitarian expertise' and operational capacity challenges limit their full engagement.
- The central government has championed localisation in the Central Sulawesi response. There is also a 'supportive policy environment' for the advancement of women's rights and protection. However, there is a lack of connection between the two, as well as limited operationalisation at a local level.

## Recommendations

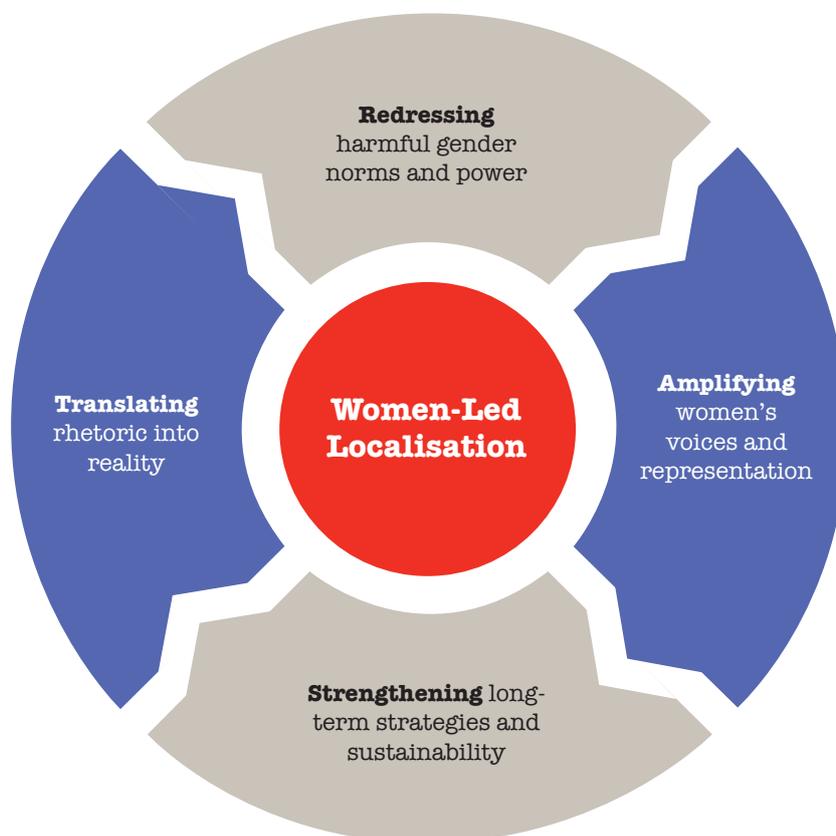
Learning from the Central Sulawesi response helps to provide useful insight into broader efforts of women-led localisation, and highlights the importance of long-term investment in women's leadership before, during and after disasters strike.

Below we outline four broad recommendations to international humanitarian actors and government (disaster management) agencies, which are further detailed in the report:

1. **Humanitarian agencies and donors need to understand the gendered norms and unequal power relations which shape women's lives prior, during and after a humanitarian crisis and reflect this operationally, from incorporating feminist analysis in needs assessments to recognising the burden of unpaid and paid care**

work on women's participation and leadership in humanitarian action.

- 2. Humanitarian agencies and donors should prioritise women's voices, perspectives and skills within humanitarian architecture and decision-making spaces as well as in their own organisations,** ensuring the participation of local women's organisations in the cluster system and having progressive plans to achieve gender equality and equity in their humanitarian teams.
- 3. Humanitarian agencies and donors should strengthen local partner capacity to respond to the unique scale, pace and demands of humanitarian response, but to do so in a way that supports and connects with the sizes, aspiration and valuable skills and longer-term gender justice work** of local women's organisations and their networks.
- 4. Government disaster management actors should foster effective dialogue and collaboration between governmental and non-governmental organisations operating at both a national and local level,** to support the implementation of gender equality and empowerment of women and girls in emergencies policies and guidelines into practice.



Yanti, 38, is photographed sitting on top of supplies donated in the wake of the Indonesia earthquakes.



Credit: ActionAid

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Three years on from the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS), ambitious plans to reform the humanitarian sector are still failing to meaningfully shift power and resources to local actors within preparedness, response and recovery efforts. Grand Bargain signatories, including donors, INGOs and United Nations agencies, continue to work in ways, which create financial, regulatory and cultural barriers that uphold exclusive patriarchal norms. Local women-led organisations<sup>1</sup> still receive a fraction of overall humanitarian funding and women are still grossly underrepresented within formal humanitarian decision-making structures and coordination mechanisms. This is despite growing and compelling evidence, which highlights that local women and women-led partners bring valuable skills and assets to localised humanitarian action.<sup>2</sup> As asserted in ActionAid and CARE's recent critique of the Grand Bargain, 'listening to women and girls, and protecting and respecting their rights, can no longer be seen as an "optional" aspect of a humanitarian response'.<sup>3</sup>

In September 2018 a series of powerful earthquakes struck the Central Sulawesi province of Indonesia. This triggered a tsunami, which resulted in significant damage and loss of life across the affected districts

of Palu, Donggala, Sigi and Parimo. The Indonesian government responded quickly to establish its leadership in the response, setting restrictions on the nature of international engagement and confirming that assistance would be channelled via national or local humanitarian partners. In many respects, this response marked a 'new' approach and way of working for the humanitarian sector, forcing international actors to rethink and reposition their roles.<sup>4</sup> However, this strong commitment to localisation at a central government level did not translate into meaningful resource, support and representation for local women and women-led organisations operating on the ground in Central Sulawesi.

ActionAid's Indonesian entity – YAPPIKA-ActionAid – was one of the first organisations to establish its presence in Palu on the ground. Working with a selection of partners, including women-led organisations, Solidaritas Perempuan Palu, WALHI Central Sulawesi and Sikola Mombine, YAPPIKA-ActionAid worked to identify and meet the needs of women and girls in affected communities. Drawing on learnings from these efforts, and in partnership with local women and women-led organisations, ActionAid undertook a piece of research to understand, within the unique parameters of the Central Sulawesi response, the challenges and opportunities for women-led localisation.

## 2. BACKGROUND

### 2.1 Localisation and women's leadership in humanitarian action

Concepts around the localisation of humanitarian aid (see Box 1) have gained traction over the last two years, following the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, where the Secretary General called for humanitarian action to be 'as local as possible, as international as necessary'.<sup>5</sup> Whether defined as 'localisation', 'local humanitarian action' or 'locally-led humanitarian action', the humanitarian sector continues to debate the actions and reforms needed to support more local humanitarian response.<sup>6</sup> While there is widespread consensus across the humanitarian sector of the significant contributions of local and national actors within response efforts, donors, INGOs and United Nations agencies continue to operate in ways which create barriers – financial, regulatory and cultural – that obstruct constructive and productive engagement with local communities and national actors and systems.<sup>7</sup> This stifles opportunities for innovation, learning and transformation across the humanitarian system, which could otherwise contribute to the practical implementation of the Grand Bargain.

As part of commitments under the Grand Bargain's Localisation Workstream (see Box 1), ActionAid, in alliance with other organisations, has worked extensively to showcase learning and to generate new evidence to support the localisation of aid, as well as garner greater global support for INGO-NNGO humanitarian partnerships (see Box 2). Civil society organisations from the Global South have also started to systematically document and advocate against

these imbalances, including highlighting issues around their limited access to direct funding and decision-making spaces.<sup>8</sup> Despite these efforts, only 0.4% of aid is currently channelled through local and national actors,<sup>9</sup> and contractual and cultural preferences that favour larger organisations continue to persist and exclude local actors.<sup>10</sup>

Despite the extensive work of organisations like ActionAid, there continues to be limited recognition of the specific contributions of women's leadership across the localisation debate, and the specific barriers they face in accessing these opportunities. While the majority of Grand Bargain signatories broadly include commitments around integrating gender equality and women and girls' rights into their work, the Grand Bargain itself was not explicit on a need to do so.<sup>11</sup> During the Grand Bargain Sherpa Meeting in Bonn (September 2016), an informal *Friends of Gender group* for the Grand Bargain was formed, within which ActionAid and other organisations continue to advocate for stronger integration of gender equality and women's empowerment across all of the Grand Bargain workstreams. In particular, this group has made the case that the success of the Localisation Workstream is dependent on 'successful engagement with and investment in women and women's organisations as local and first responders, given the reality of women's leadership in local response'.<sup>12</sup>

As further asserted in ActionAid and CARE's recent critique of the Grand Bargain,<sup>13</sup> there is also a need to expand and nuance our conceptualisation of localisation, which has largely centred on quantitative indicators of localisation, and have failed to take into consideration qualitative aspects of meaningful partnership, including the quality of funding and capacity strengthening.

### Box 1. The Grand Bargain and localisation in context

**The Grand Bargain:**<sup>i</sup> The Grand Bargain is an agreement between humanitarian agencies and large donors, with a commitment to make the humanitarian ecosystem more efficient, effective and people centred. It was put in place following the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, recognising that adequate, timely and predictable funding is essential for successful humanitarian response. The Grand Bargain includes a series of changes in the working practices of donors and aid organisations. ActionAid is one of 61 Grand Bargain signatories (24 member states, 21 (I)NGOs, 12 UN agencies, two Red Cross movements, and two inter-governmental organisations) working on ten workstreams to implement these commitments.

**Localisation Workstream:**<sup>ii</sup> Following the Grand Bargain, a series of workstreams were established to take forward each of the 10 Grand Bargain commitments and bring together representatives of

donors and aid organisations. Specifically, the Localisation Workstream focuses on facilitating ‘more support and funding tools for local and national responders’ and is intended to build momentum for signatories to meet their commitments on the localisation agenda. To do this, it holds the following six Grand Bargain commitments: 1) Increase and support multi-year investment in the institutional capacities of local and national responders; 2) Work to remove or reduce barriers that prevent organisations and donors from partnering with local and national responders; 3) Support and complement national coordination mechanisms where they exist and include local and national responders in international coordination mechanisms as appropriate; 4) Achieve by 2020 a global, aggregated target of at least 25% of humanitarian funding to local and national responders as directly as possible; 5) Develop and apply a ‘localisation’ marker to measure direct and indirect funding to local and national responders; and 6) Make greater use of funding tools which increase and improve assistance delivered by local and national responders.

**Defining localisation:** Although there is no single definition of localisation, the signatories under the Grand Bargain have committed to ‘making principled humanitarian action as local as possible and as international as necessary’, while continuing to recognise the vital role of international actors. For ActionAid, localising humanitarian action involves shifting power and agency, as well as financial and technical capacity, to local and national responders. The shift must have women and women-led organisations at its forefront, bringing their invaluable contextual knowledge, skills and resources to emergency preparedness, response and resilience-building. ActionAid understands localisation as a transformative process which puts local women and women-led organisations from affected communities at the centre and forefront of humanitarian preparedness and response, as part of a feminist approach to humanitarian action.



## Box 2. ActionAid's contributions to localisation

ActionAid prioritises working through local partners in all of its humanitarian work. This has enabled the organisation to meaningfully follow-through with commitments to women's leadership and localisation under the Grand Bargain. Rather than emphasise the traditional divide between rich countries that raise funds and poorer ones on which the money is spent, ActionAid strives to work together in a spirit of equality, democracy and accountability. For ActionAid, localisation encompasses shifting the power from international to local, from North to South, and from a male-dominated system to one which empowers and positions women in more leadership and central roles.

During the World Humanitarian Summit, ActionAid pursued this approach with a number of women first responders from crisis-affected countries and advocated for a renewed and revitalised humanitarian system fit for the 21st century that promotes dedicated localisation of humanitarian response, and giving greater recognition, resourcing and voice to national and community actors. The organisation has been contributing to this renewal of the humanitarian system for many years, through different projects and initiatives, as illustrated below:

The **Accelerating Localisation Through Partnerships**<sup>iii</sup> programme (which began in November 2017, due to complete in October 2019), implemented by a consortium of agencies (ActionAid, Christian Aid, CARE, Tearfund, CAFOD, Oxfam), and their local partners, has built on the actions called for by the 'Missed Opportunities' programme (described below). It aims to foster the power of strong partnerships between national and local NGOs and INGOs to strengthen local leadership of humanitarian response and advance the localisation agenda in Myanmar, Nepal, Nigeria and South Sudan. This programme is one of only a few initiatives funded by the European Commission's Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid department in support of the Grand Bargain Localisation Agenda. The programme has been focused on generating evidence and learnings to understand which operational elements of partnerships between local, national and international NGOs are most likely to foster localisation of humanitarian action.

The **Missed Opportunities**<sup>iv</sup> research is a series of reports that were formed in 2013 as part of a project research consortia between ActionAid and CAFOD, Christian Aid, Oxfam and Tearfund. The reports documented and researched partnership experiences of INGOs with local groups in several humanitarian responses (ranging from the Haiti earthquake in 2010 to the Nepal earthquake in 2015). The Missed Opportunities research shows that national and local actors' understanding of context and local dynamics allows them to shape programmes, accordingly, making the response relevant and appropriate. In the run-up to the World Humanitarian Summit, findings from the research were summarised in a synthesis paper, *Missed Opportunities No More*, which advocated for the localisation of aid and greater global support for INGO-NNGO humanitarian partnerships. The consortia called upon the humanitarian system to foster a vibrant national humanitarian response capacity that can implement responses either by partnerships or by independent actors which would be achieved through a mutual strengthening of capacity; an adjustment in resourcing mechanisms to benefit national systems and NGOs; and the ability to use partnership as a means to scale up preparedness.

ActionAid is a member of the **Start Network**, which manages the Start Fund, a multi-donor pooled fund which provides small-scale grants for small-to-medium-scale emergencies that often receive little funding. The fund is provided for rapid response for 45 days for a total project cap of up to £300k. Projects are chosen by local committees, made up of staff from Start Network members and their NGO partners, within 72 hours of an alert. Decisions on when to release funding and to which agencies are taken by the Start Network members, including ActionAid, without needing approval from other donors. This makes the Start Fund the fastest, collectively owned, early response mechanism in the world.

ActionAid as a member of the Start Network consortium supported and led on the **Shifting the Power (STP)<sup>v</sup>** project as part of UK government's Disasters Emergency Preparedness Programme (DEPP). This was a three-year project with two years of programmatic support for 55 local and national partners in five countries: Bangladesh, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya and Pakistan, with an aim to strengthen their capacity to determine and deliver humanitarian preparedness and response. Its focus was to shift the power to local organisations who were the first responders in a humanitarian response, yet often remain ignored in the humanitarian system. The project held an objective to strengthen national capacity for decision-making and leadership, and help national organisations achieve better representation, voice and recognition. At the same time, it influenced international organisations to support and promote the work of local and national organisations. The humanitarian capacity self-assessment and capacity strengthening plans were completed by each partner organisation using the 'Strategic Humanitarian Assessment and Participatory Empowerment' (SHAPE) framework. An external Learning Review<sup>vi</sup> also reveals that in addition to improved capacities, Shifting the Power also invested in the following aspects that would contribute to better quality, more effective and accountable response: (a) ability to bring the response closer to the affected communities; (b) validation by third party quality assurance (Core Humanitarian Standard), and (c) establishing complaint response mechanisms.

The **Transforming Surge Capacity<sup>vii</sup>** project was similarly a three-year project that was also part of the government's DEPP and was led by ActionAid. The project created shared rosters that drew on skills and resources across the sector in order to maximise the knowledge and resources to help target aid more effectively and help national and local agencies play a greater role. Similarly, the project created platforms at regional and national level to build strong links across partners in the project. These platforms piloted new ways to make surge capacity more collaborative. Over the three years it was funded, the project aimed to 1) Strengthen national and regional surge systems to work better with international systems; 2) Help organisations move from focusing on their individual surge capacity to working with others to build everyone's capacity; and 3) Bring external stakeholders like the United Nations, private companies and universities on-board to explore how they can help.<sup>viii</sup>

Building on the extensive work of ActionAid and others, this research and our concept of 'women-led localisation' draws explicit attention to the concept of women's leadership as it relates to localisation. Our definition of 'women-led localisation' (see Box 3) highlights that localisation must be a transformative process which puts women and girls at its centre and values the significant role of women's leadership at a local level as part of humanitarian action. It also crucially acknowledges the multiple responsibilities that women face, including unpaid care work, and advocates for supportive and practical solutions to address these barriers.

From a rights-based perspective, prioritising women's leadership is fundamentally 'the right thing to do' as 'women must contribute to the decisions that affect their lives. Women make up 50% of the population, but often remain excluded from groups and processes that determine their own futures'.<sup>14</sup> Regrettably, in the male-dominated, patriarchal world of humanitarian aid, the needs and rights of women can be, and often are, overlooked, ignored and deprioritised. This is particularly problematic when considering the disproportionate impact women and girls often experience during humanitarian emergencies.

## Box 3. Defining Women-Led Localisation

The localisation agenda continues to marginalise the specific and crucial contributions of women's leadership within humanitarian action. The Grand Bargain is also silent on this issue.

For ActionAid, women's leadership may occur at different levels. It involves women and girls guiding processes, resources and people, and having influence over the decisions that affect their lives. It centres on women having the agency to elect where they want to be and how they can contribute to social justice, gender equality and poverty eradication. This can be done from within political or managerial roles, but also at a local level, setting the agenda and promoting change.

Women-led localisation is a process progressively connecting national women's networks and grassroots women's organisations, with the international women's rights movement, to call for a radical shift in the power relations and resources within the humanitarian system. Women-led localisation ensures that women's leadership and agency is at the centre of humanitarian work. It refers to the multifaceted leadership roles that diverse groups of women and women-led organisations play in preparedness, response and recovery settings, which are often under-resourced and overlooked.

It is not proposed that women-led organisations should be the sole responders in humanitarian settings, or that these contributions do not come with their own demands and burdens. Rather, this concept promotes and supports women, girls and women-led organisations, so they are fairly represented and can lead preparedness and response work in affected community structures and in humanitarian global and national decision-making spaces.

Strengthening international and national investment in local women-led organisations and their opportunities for collaboration, advances the presence and recognition of women-led organisation in the humanitarian system. This will contribute to addressing women and girl's specific needs, as well as advance gender equality and women's rights and make responses more effective for the whole community. This is because women bring a strong understanding of the local context and the needs and realities of women, girls and the community, and are often able to gain access to hard-to-reach communities and those who are most marginalised. Their contribution is vital not only in response, but in preparedness mechanisms, consultations, decision-making processes and coordination mechanisms on humanitarian action.

Beyond the rights-based intrinsic case, local women and women-led organisations bring valuable skills and assets to localised humanitarian action.<sup>15</sup> They are often able to gain access to hard-to-reach communities and those most marginalised within them, they bring a strong understanding of the local context and the needs and realities of women, girls and the community as a whole, and they offer crucial insight into how to engage with key stakeholders. If local women and women-led organisations are not supported to lead within localisation processes there is the risk that the needs of communities will not be met, and that their exclusion will reinforce structural inequalities. ActionAid's experience shows that if you put women in the driving seat, not only will their lives and livelihoods be protected with dignity, but also the

wider community will benefit, and the foundation can be laid for long-term transformational change.

Despite this growing and compelling evidence, local women-led organisations still receive a fraction of overall humanitarian funding,<sup>16</sup> women are still largely underrepresented within formal humanitarian decision-making structures and coordination mechanisms<sup>17</sup> and women and girls' needs are still largely unmet in humanitarian responses. This report explores these challenges – and opportunities – within the context of the Central Sulawesi response in Indonesia to understand the reality of women-led localisation in this context and what more needs to be done by Grand Bargain signatories to support its realisation.

## Box 4. Impact of the Central Sulawesi disaster on women and girls

- Early assessments noted overcrowding of shelters and a lack of privacy, with 88% of sites being in open space, and 81% of shelters being made of tarpaulin.<sup>x</sup>
- In 52% of displacement sites, bathrooms and/or toilets were identified as unsafe spaces for women.<sup>x</sup>
- Damage to food gardens impacted women's ability to sell the surpluses, diminishing their access to income.<sup>xi</sup>
- The risk of gender-based violence was compounded by a lack of camp coordination structure, lack of electricity and infrastructure, and the distances to, and condition of, water and sanitation facilities.<sup>xii</sup>
- As food was scarce, girls and women were less likely to have access to food that was high in protein and fat. Pregnant and/or lactating women were at particular nutritional risk.<sup>xiii</sup>

### 2.2 Disaster response in the Indonesian context and the Central Sulawesi response

Located near the intersection of shifting tectonic plates, Indonesia is prone to natural hazards such as earthquakes, tsunamis and volcanic eruptions, with the ongoing climate crisis amplifying more frequent and intense tropical storms and droughts. The World Risk Index categorises the country as at 'high risk' of disaster,<sup>18</sup> with an average of 289 significant sudden onset disasters per year and an average annual death toll of approximately 8,000 people.<sup>19</sup>

In response, the Indonesian government has been investing in national and local disaster management systems and spends \$300 to \$500 million annually on post-disaster reconstruction. The 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami marked a major turning point in the government's capacity in disaster risk management, including enacting a new law on disaster management in 2007 (Law 24/2007) and the following year establishing a National Disaster Management Agency (BNPB) whose budget allocation for disaster management increased 500% from 2010 to 2014.<sup>20</sup>

On August 9, 2018, an earthquake with a magnitude of 6.9 struck the resort island of Lombok, killing at least 430 people and injuring more than 1,300 others. Hundreds of thousands of people were displaced, rendered homeless amid hundreds of powerful aftershocks.<sup>21</sup> This was then followed by another disaster of unprecedented scale; on September 28, a series of earthquakes struck the Central Sulawesi province of Indonesia. The strongest earthquake, with an overall magnitude of M7.5, precipitated a sequence of foreshocks and tremors that led to a tsunami, resulting in significant damage and loss of life across the affected districts of Palu,

Donggala, Sigi and Parimo. The combined effects of the earthquake and tsunami led to over 2,000 casualties being recorded during the disaster and a further 200,000 people being displaced from their homes.<sup>22</sup>



## Box 5. ActionAid's response in Central Sulawesi

- ActionAid was one of the first organisation to respond on the ground in Palu. In the first two weeks of the response, ActionAid's Indonesian entity - YAPPIKA-ActionAid (YAA) - worked with a network of local organisations called 'Sulteng Bergerak' to bring relief to at least 60,000 people. Local volunteers provided supplies, ran emergency kitchens serving hot food to displaced people and participated in search and rescue missions.
- Immediately following the emergency, YAPPIKA-ActionAid (YAA) worked with a coalition of local Civil Society Organisations called 'SultengBergerak (SB).' SB quickly mobilised teams of local volunteers who responded in Palu, Donggala and Sigi, carrying out needs assessments and providing relief supplies including tents, tarpaulins, water and food.
- Along with three local organisations, WALHI Central Sulawesi, Sikola Mombine and Solidaritas Perempuan, ActionAid successfully delivered food, shelter, protection and livelihoods and accountability activities in the first six months of the response. Results include: building 25 expandable houses housing 144 individuals in Rano Village, establishing and running 2 women friendly spaces, training 20 women in the community on protection and gender based issues.
- Phase 2 of the response started in April 2019 and focuses on recovery, putting women at the centre of resilience building in Central Sulawesi. YAA and partners are now building more expandable houses and expanding livelihood activities through women-led businesses.

The Indonesian government quickly responded and established its leadership role, setting tight restrictions on the nature of international engagement and confirming that assistance must be channelled via national or local humanitarian partners.<sup>23</sup> As a consequence, international humanitarian actors were forced to rethink and reposition their roles and in the first few weeks of the response, 96% of reported activities were implemented through national NGOs, PMI and the government.<sup>24</sup> While this demonstrated the important stepping up of national engagement, it did not translate into increased visibility of local people and local partners – specifically local women and women-led partners in initial assessments, response efforts and ongoing decision-making spaces. This was particularly concerning considering the findings from rapid gender assessments carried out by partners in the first weeks of the response, which found that women and girls had been disproportionately impacted by the disaster (see Box 4). Organisations like YAPPIKA-ActionAid worked with women-led partners to try and meet the needs of women and girls in affected communities.

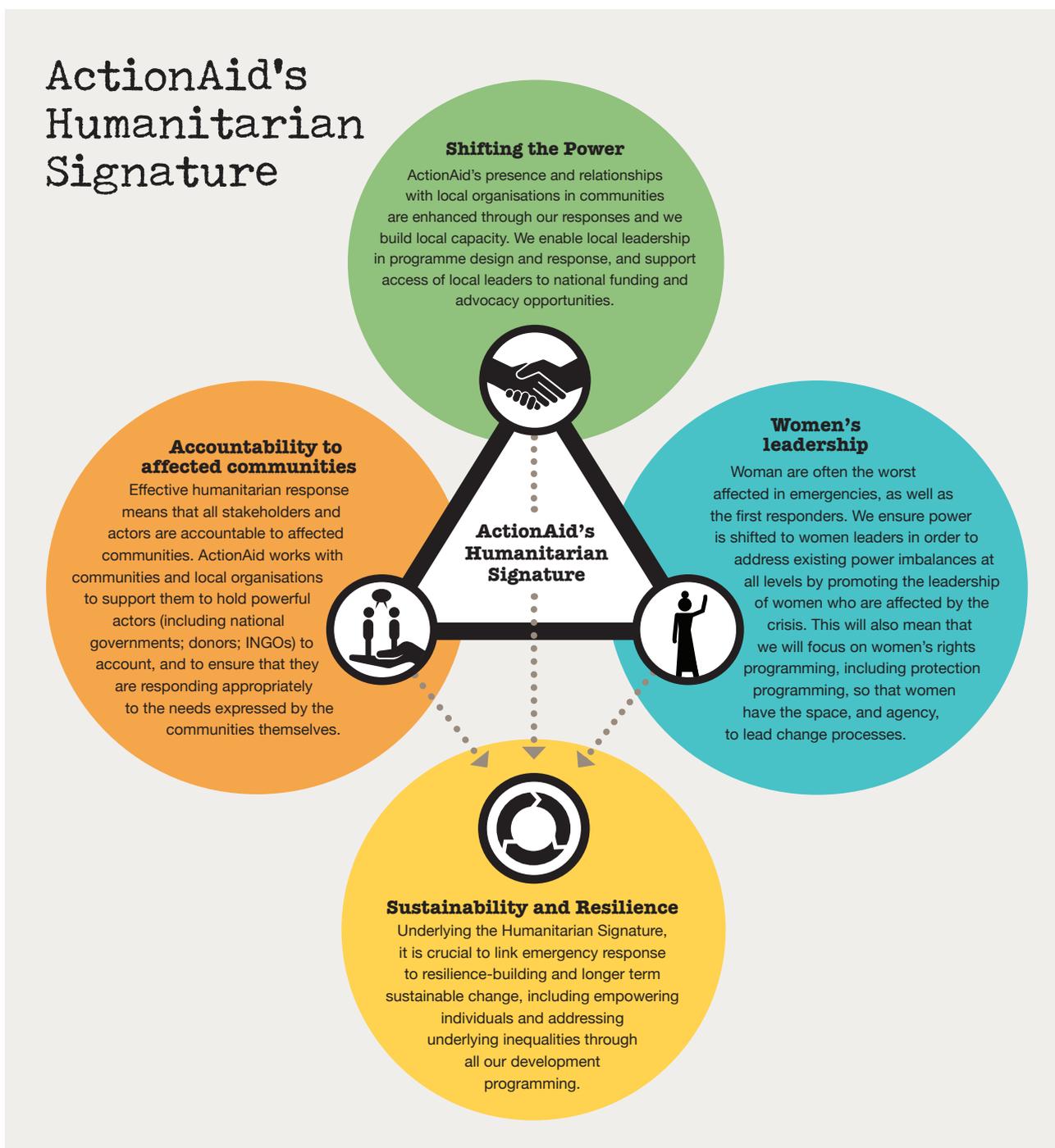


Credit: ActionAid

## 2.3 ActionAid's approach and methodology

Guided by the globally accepted humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence,<sup>25</sup> and underpinned by a Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA), ActionAid's humanitarian work is guided by three key components: 1) shifting power, 2) accountability to affected communities and 3) women's leadership. This is underpinned by resilience and longer-term sustainability, to empower individuals and address underlying inequalities through all our development programming (see the

diagram below for further information). This approach has been put in place to promote, enable and support the role, agency and leadership of women in humanitarian action, and their representation in humanitarian policy spaces. Through this, ActionAid puts an emphasis on engaging social movements and local partners in decision-making and works towards embodying humanitarian response differently from the traditional model, by placing disaster-affected communities at the centre of the debate and more strongly supporting communities to hold the humanitarian system to account.



Research is one of ActionAid’s strongest tools for external engagement, impact and programme learning. Research products are key to bringing about shifts in power that will ensure that women and young people living in poverty and exclusion secure their rights. To address the structural causes of poverty and to challenge and defeat patriarchal power, and other interlinking systems of oppression based on race, class, geography, sexual orientation and gender identity, we need decision makers to shift their views and actions. We need the evidence to challenge how and where power negatively manifests and reproduces.

ActionAid is committed to challenging and diversifying whose knowledge counts, starting with people’s role in shaping the priorities and evidence itself and strengthening alternative narratives which go some way to challenging how people see and understand the world. Research and policy analysis, combined with collective action and ongoing reflection by those involved, is necessary to build evidence-based alternatives to convince decision-makers to change. Our approach is summarised in ActionAid’s Research Signature:

## Box 7. ActionAid’s Research Signature

ActionAid Research Signature principle	What this means in practice
<b>People living in poverty are empowered by our research – both process and product:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Active in identifying research priorities and methodology</li> <li>Active in using the research evidence for influencing change at different levels</li> <li>Actively represented throughout the research outputs and attribution; voices are amplified through analysis, perspectives, quotes, pictures and stories</li> <li>Ownership of analysis and intellectual property is jointly shared with communities</li> </ul>
<b>Strong feminist analysis</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Involves the participation of people living in poverty and exclusion and their movements directly (wherever possible) at every stage of the research process, including in identifying questions, thorough joint analysis and by bringing in new knowledge and strategies for change</li> <li>Includes a poverty and exclusion lens and an intersectional analysis</li> <li>Looks at the interconnectedness of structural causes of rights violations from local, national, regional and global perspectives</li> <li>Looks at the roles and rights of various actors linked to a problem and the dimensions of power that characterise their relationship</li> <li>Is rigorous, comprehensive, accurate, transparent, ethical and fair</li> <li>Recognises creativity and non-traditional research processes as authentic tools of resistance and transformation</li> </ul>
<b>Linking our work across levels and adding value as a federation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evidence of rights violations at any level provide the basis for changes at other levels (local, national, regional and international)</li> <li>Knowledge from different levels supports us to identify pathways for change</li> </ul>
<b>Innovative and engaging</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bold in message, audience appropriate and accessible in language, with a clear change strategy</li> <li>Useful and used in practically influencing change around ActionAid’s strategic objectives, as well as being timely</li> <li>Relevant and applicable at local, national and international levels, as measured by agreed indicators</li> </ul>
<b>Research partnerships</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Build solidarity, power, knowledge and capacity between and among ActionAid and different research actors, communities or organisations involved in research – in partnership</li> </ul>

Guided by both ActionAid's Humanitarian Signature and ActionAid's Research Signature, this research focused on exploring a multidimensional concept of women's leadership, considering the interconnected roles of sociocultural and political structures, and people's individual experiences. A core research team with representatives across ActionAid UK, ActionAid International and YAPPIKA-ActionAid (YAA) worked collaborative with local women-led organisations Solidaritas Perempuan and WALHI, to help design the research, collect data and validate findings and recommendations. In addition to a rapid desk-based

literature review, primary data was collected through a series of key informant interviews and focus group discussions in Palu, Jakarta and remotely, with a range of stakeholders from local organisations, INGOs, NGOs, government and UN representatives. We acknowledge the limitations of a small study of this kind; ActionAid is keen to replicate, strengthen and expand its research efforts and evidence base across the organisation's humanitarian work, and more fully implement the different elements of our Research Signature, including bringing a stronger intersectional lens to our analysis.



Elda, a medical volunteer, checks the health of a newborn baby at the coconut farm-turned-shelter.

Credit: Andri Tambunan/ActionAid



Yurni, 55, looks after her sick grandson, two-year-old Zahid, inside a makeshift tent.

Credit: ActionAid

## 3. KEY FINDINGS

### 3.1 Women-led localisation in practice

Despite limited visibility within formal response efforts and limited acknowledgement across actors working at a national and international level, this research identified that diverse local women and women-led organisations were some of the first actors to mobilise and respond on the ground in Central Sulawesi. These actors leveraged their trusted positions in communities, and existing connections and networks, to move quickly and effectively. They were able to provide key services for the community, including supporting evacuation processes and food and clothes distributions, acting as medical personnel and supporting school reconstruction.

In addition, local women and women-led organisations have played a critical role in identifying and supporting the specific and diverse needs of women and girls in the community. For example, in setting up and managing safe spaces (including Women Friendly Spaces and Women Friendly Tents), delivering psychosocial services and trauma healing, and creating opportunities for women and children to come together and share their experiences and concerns. They have also played a key role in raising the profile of, and advocating on, key concerns with local authorities and implementing agencies. These concerns have included issues faced by women farmers and their need for land for planting after liquefaction, the need for better quality and tailored protection services, and the security and sanitation conditions in their temporary communal shelters. As a selection of our case studies below reveal, women’s leadership across the Central Sulawesi

Local women and women-led organisations in Palu have been contributing to the Central Sulawesi response in many different ways:

Facilitating evacuation processes	Managing food and clothes distributions	Fostering solidarity and strengthening support networks	Supporting school reconstruction	Managing Women Friendly Spaces and Women Friendly Tents
Providing psychosocial services and trauma healing	Offering crucial insight on the specific needs of women and girls in communities	Lobbying the government on the security and sanitation of temporary shelters	Leading farming activities and generating income for families and communities	Performing key functions as trained medical personnel in communities

response has taken many forms. These stories provide a very brief snapshot of some of the diverse experiences of women in Central Sulawesi, however it is important to remember that women do not form an homogenous community and that there are many perspectives and voices which have not been

captured as part of this small qualitative study. Further research and intersectional feminist analysis is needed for us to continue to document and explore the wide-ranging and varied experiences of women during humanitarian action.

## Siti Zulaika (Juli), 31, was actively involved in the Central Sulawesi disaster response.

Working with Solidaritas Perempuan, a local women's organisation, Juli was one of the first responders on the ground in Palu, Sigi and Dongala. Despite being directly impacted by the disaster, she came together with other women to build a satellite office of volunteers. As Juli reflects, "there were so many dead. A lot of mothers lost their children and of course their homes. During this dark time, I was I worried for my own child – I didn't know where my daughter was because we lost phone network. When I found out that she was okay I was relieved. We are all victims, but when we felt ready and we knew that our families were okay, then we were able to focus on the situation and help."

Juli and her colleagues identified many issues impacting women and girls in the community, including the lack of safety and sanitation in the temporary shelters. "The tents were built with weak material and were leaking with water. I saw one tent where there were nine households living together, with women and girls, men and boys, all in the same place, which we saw could create a risk of harassment and violence." Beyond the physical impact of the disaster, Juli also highlighted the lots of people "cannot sleep at night as they are still [experiencing] trauma."

As a leader in her community, Juli recognises the layers of injustice faced by women and girls in humanitarian responses and that women's safety is at the forefront of a response. She believes that is important for women to be in leadership roles in emergency responses. "It is important to build women's leadership so that the needs and capacities of women and children will be recognised," she said. "I like this process with ActionAid because it builds on the gender perspective. This helps to show the scale of the issues and what needs to be prioritised to help the sustainability of this work."



## Mama Minuk, 54, is a mother-of-three whose village (Rogo) was affected by the earthquake and tsunami.

Following the disaster, Mama Minuk's property and housing were destroyed and, along with her neighbours, she was forced to reside in temporary huts and shelters by the neighbouring hill with her family.

In Rogo village, ActionAid's partner WALHI Central Sulawesi provides assistance and several post-disaster activities, including farmer groups, which Mama Manuk has actively participated in. She coordinated and invited women to be active in the group's activities, including replanting crops, and has significantly contributed to the solidarity and livelihoods of women in the community.

Mama Minuk spoke highly about the importance of working together and supporting each other, including sharing stories and shared experiences as part of the healing process. "Living in the temporary shelter was one of the most difficult time in my life so far," she said. "Joining the farmer group and gardening with other women makes me happy – we are able to share stories, which helps to lessen my trauma."



## Endang, 20, highlights the need to involve young people in capacity strengthening and post-disaster activities.

Motivated by the women farmers in her community, who took immediate and responsive action following the earthquake and tsunami, Endang became passionate about participating in women's groups to support her community. Although initially she felt too young and afraid to speak in public, with her community's support she is now one of the youngest members of the WALHI women farmers group.

Since then, she has been chosen to be a member of the Citizens' Forum in Rogo village and is the sole representative of young people in her region. She highlighted that "young people should also be able to lead and motivate others" as their energy and creativity will bring a new and different approach to planning. She understands the need to create more spaces for young people to strengthen their capacity and confidence, and recommends specific training for youth, who should be brought into community decision-making as early as possible.



**Fitri, 35, is a mother-of-three who advocates for the rights of women in her community.**

Following the disaster, Fitri was forced to live in a temporary shelter with her husband and three children. She has been attending one of the Women Friendly Spaces managed by Sikola Mombine, which she stated was a safe and open space for her “to express my thoughts and build my motivation for positive change”. Through these activities, Fitri built her awareness of protection issues and her confidence to support other women in the community to discuss these issues more openly. Raising awareness about women’s rights supported further conversations in her community around women’s safety and the necessity to include more protection mechanisms when responding to humanitarian responses. Now, further conversations are ongoing in her community about the importance of equality in the household and the significance of women’s role not only as contributors of their community, but as leaders too.



### **3.2 Opportunities and challenges for women-led localisation**

Despite the widespread examples of women leading different activities as part of the humanitarian response and recovery processes in Central

Sulawesi, this research identified a number of cross-cutting opportunities and challenges for women-led localisation in this context. The following section provides a brief overview of some of these key themes, drawing directly from the voices of women on the ground.



Ningsih from Donggala District.

Credit: ActionAid, Agatha Roulina Tambunan

**Gender norms and power: Existing gender inequalities have been exacerbated and disrupted following the Central Sulawesi disaster. This has created both risk and opportunity.**

There has been some progress in women's decision-making power and influence over different aspects of social, political and economic life globally, but these gains remain under threat.<sup>26</sup> Limited progress also masks significant disparities within regions and countries, and resistance and backlash continue to be common.<sup>27</sup> Dominant gender norms,<sup>28</sup> which assign domestic and caring duties to women, and may discourage them from taking on roles within public life, especially positions of leadership, continue to prevail. This is particularly notable in countries with widespread conservative religious and/or patriarchal customary practices.<sup>29</sup>

These challenges are played out in the Indonesian context. In many respects, there have been notable progressive advances for women's rights; after a long period of authoritarian rule, the country experienced a transition to democracy in 1998, ushering in a period of political, social and economic reforms called 'reformasi'. During this time the government established several institutional policies and programmes to address women's specific needs, mainstream gender issues through the work of government agencies, legislated for a zero tolerance policy against violence against women, and introduced measures to strengthen women's political representation through a mandatory 30% quota for political parties to include women in its list of parliamentary candidates in 2013.<sup>30</sup> There is also a thriving women's movement, which has been instrumental in lobbying to get a sexual violence bill, the domestic workers' bill and rights for indigenous people bills passed.

However, despite these gains, a patriarchal culture continues to infuse through many facets of Indonesian culture despite the country's diversity, reinforcing gendered inequalities and discrimination.<sup>31</sup> Women are still less likely to be active in the formal workforce, to own productive assets and to exercise economic leadership,<sup>32</sup> and are vulnerable to some of the highest rates of gender-based violence in the region.<sup>33</sup> These issues are particularly pronounced in Central Sulawesi, where there is a deeply patriarchal society; women and girls are particularly vulnerable to gender-based violence, including child marriage (19% of women are married before the age of 18, with higher levels of child marriage among girls from the poorest households), and are largely prohibited or discouraged from participating and leading in public life and decision-making.<sup>34</sup>

As illustrated in the case of the Central Sulawesi disaster, during and after crises, pre-existing gender inequalities, discrimination, and unequal power relations may be exacerbated. As a result, many women experience hardships, including increased insecurity, restricted mobility, sexual exploitation and abuse, and gender-based violence.<sup>35</sup> Women's livelihoods also tend to be disproportionately affected, and the lack of healthcare in humanitarian settings impacts women's sexual and reproductive health needs.<sup>36</sup> Rapid gender assessments and interviews for this research revealed that the situation for women and girls in Sulawesi intensified after the disaster. Due to the expectation for women to take on unpaid care and domestic work, women were found to have faced increases in their workload following the loss of their husband's livelihoods. In addition, many of their sources of personal income had been destroyed (e.g. selling surplus food from food gardens, which had been damaged in the disaster).<sup>37</sup>

Interviews for this research also highlighted a 'vacuum in power', which was seen to be the result of men in the community being displaced as the sole breadwinners for their families. Women described this sense of disenfranchisement, in some instances, as contributing to potential increases in intimate partner violence.

**"Mothers have it double, their work is double"**  
(woman responder from a community in Palu)

**"We have a patriarchal culture that has been handed down from generation to generation. Women are told they have to behave like this or behave like that"**  
(woman responder from a community in Palu)

Growing evidence indicates that in times of crisis there may be a rare opportunity to re-shape gender roles and relations.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, times of political transition and change (including post-conflict peace processes and constitutional reform) offer critical opportunities for women to try and renegotiate their access to rights.<sup>39</sup> While some evidence has suggested limited changes in the division of roles between men and women after the disaster in Central Sulawesi, women interviewed for this research positively described the new opportunities that had

been created for them to step up and take on new responsibilities. As outlined, this research identified many powerful examples of the solidarity, strength and resilience of local women and women-led organisations coming together to support response efforts, in addition to taking a lead role in their own economic empowerment and livelihood options.

“Before the disaster, I was only at home taking care of my children and had never taken part in activities outside the home. Now I’m participating in livelihood activities”

(woman responder, from a community in Palu)

“Men and husbands are accustomed to working outside the home and earning income. After this disaster many men are stressed out because they lose their jobs and have no income. Women, including as mothers, can’t remain silent. They must think about their children needing to eat every day and must think about how to meet their daily needs”

(woman responder, from a community in Palu)

“When I visited the project sites, I saw that women hold very vital positions in their communities. Without women, those tents feeding people would disappear. Without women, everything here would fall to pieces”

(INGO, Palu)

In some cases, men in the community were seen to be allies in these endeavours. As wider evidence suggests, often a crucial component of the success of women in leadership roles is the men and families also willing to act against gender expectations and norms within their society.<sup>40</sup> A supportive family can therefore be a critical resource for women’s leadership.<sup>41</sup>

Discussing shared experiences, building solidarity and courage in numbers may help groups of women challenge these exclusionary norms.<sup>42</sup> As outlined, this research found many examples of women coming together to provide support, strengthen and encourage each others’ activities, helping increase the power of their actions.

“My husband was willing to share the role of caring for children.

After finishing activities or taking part in training, I always told my husband what I learnt so that he understood about women’s rights. Because of my husband’s support, I was motivated to continue to be active and involved in Sikola Mombine”

(woman responder, from a community in Palu)

“Women’s leadership in disaster response is very important – women can mutually strengthen each other”

(women-led organisation, Palu)

Findings from the Central Sulawesi response emphasise the importance of understanding the gendered norms and unequal power relations which shape women’s lives prior, during and after crisis. This research also highlights the often multiple and competing paid and unpaid responsibilities placed on women. For meaningful gender transformative solutions to be designed and implemented, gender norms and power relations must be examined and shifted. There is an opportunity for humanitarian policy makers and practitioners to better link gendered needs and the underlying gender inequality they are derived from.<sup>43</sup>



**Women’s voice and representation: Formal decision-making structures and coordination mechanisms for the Central Sulawesi response continue to be dominated by men. However, some local women and women-led organisations have been able to assert influence in local decision-making spaces**

Men continue to dominate mainstream political organisations and public institutions. This lack of representation extends to related processes and structures within the peace and security sphere – for example, between 1990 and 2017, women constituted only 2% of mediators, 8% of negotiators and 5% of witnesses and signatories in all major peace process.<sup>44</sup> In 2017, women’s representation among military troops was only 4%<sup>45</sup> and in UN peace operations it was 10%.<sup>46</sup>

Interestingly, while it is widely acknowledged that patterns of women’s under-representation translate through to the humanitarian sector, there is still a lack of evidence to illustrate these significant gaps. The data that is available reveals quite stark disparities. For example, the IASC Committee of the Principals

has 19 positions (chair, full members and standing invitees) and only six of these are held by women.<sup>47</sup> Evidence also shows that despite some examples of good practice, much more needs to be done to encourage more women to take up surge roles and ensure gender equality in international surge. At present, women currently represent just 40% of international surge deployments.<sup>48</sup>

In Indonesia, women’s senior level representation continues to be low across political and public institutions. Although President Jokowi’s incumbency has the highest number of women in parliament (17%), it is still far from the stipulated 30% quota requirement.<sup>49</sup> There is modest optimism that the next House of Representatives will be more ‘gender-aware’ following the 2019 legislative election ushering in a higher percentage of women to the House, however, even with these gains, numbers remain low.<sup>50</sup> This lack of representation is extended through several government institutions, including those tasked with managing disaster management, including the BNPB. This is in turn reflected through a lack of women represented with management roles within implementing organisations working on humanitarian response.

“I bring the perspective of women, but my team is all men”  
(INGO, Jakarta)

“We are not able to find women for management roles”  
(INGO, Jakarta)

Interviewees for this research highlighted that while most implementing organisations working on the response had relatively high numbers of women represented within their staff contingents, they tended to occupy more administrative and low-middle management roles, with only a few women represented within senior management teams.

In addition, interviewees for this research identified a significant lack of women and women-led organisations represented within the cluster structures during the early stages of the response. For the small selection of organisations that did attend these meetings – including at the sub-cluster level (on GBV mainly) – several had stopped attending as they felt their inputs were not accommodated or valued. These patterns were also observed during the earthquake in 2009 in West Sumatra, where local organisations reported that they did not strongly participate in cluster activities and gaining access to government representatives for influencing purposes proved difficult.<sup>51</sup>

In both cases women cited a lack of information, language barriers (i.e. meetings were conducted in English), and limited transport options to support their access to meetings, where women were either dependent on men or unable to join because of childcare commitments. While it is acknowledged that these barriers may be experienced by all local actors, evidence shows gender norms that prohibit and/or discourage women’s participation (as discussed above), the dearth of representation of women within country humanitarian structures, and the limited self-confidence of women and smaller women-led organisations, compound to further exclude local women. This lack of representation is seen to negatively impact on the extent to which women and girls’ needs and priorities may be adequately integrated into response planning and programme design, and this was highlighted by interviewees for this research. Despite a lack of visibility within formal decision-

making structures, a selection of interviewees did draw attention to the ways in which local women had been given a platform to voice their concerns and suggestions within more localised and informal spaces. One example of this, which was described by several interviewees, referred to the ‘Musrenbang’ at village, sub-district and district level. Broadly the ‘Musrenbang’ is a forum which usually takes place on an annual basis and provides an opportunity for community members to discuss and agree on the planned Development Work Plan (RKP) for the upcoming financial year. Interviews for this research suggested that women had been able to voice their concerns using this platform, including in relation to issues such as the conditions of temporary shelters (‘huntara’).

“Our organisation is not seen to bring much help to the cluster. In the cluster discussions, women are not considered as important and are underestimated. In discussions about handling vulnerable groups, we are rarely involved”  
(women-led organisation, Palu)

However, this research found important geographical differences in this regard, with Palu and Sigi seen to be far more progressive than Dongala. While these ‘informal’ spaces were not seen as a substitute for women’s voices being represented within the formal humanitarian architecture, they were acknowledged as important examples of the community supporting women’s leadership potential. However, it is important to note that patriarchal and elite power may still circulate within these spaces and as such there is a need to ensure – rather than assume – that power is genuinely shifted.

“In Palu and Sigi, it’s common for women to have a leadership position in the village. But in Dongala it’s still lacking, and even more so in rural areas. We need to carry out activities to help women believe they have the right to be involved in decision-making”  
(INGO, Palu)

Findings from the Central Sulawesi response emphasise that if women's voices, perspectives and skills are not prioritised within humanitarian architecture and decision-making spaces, their issues are less likely to be understood and responded to, and existing vulnerabilities and inequalities may be reinforced. Crucially this is also about moving beyond simply being granted access to participate, to strengthening opportunities for influence.

### **Long-term strategies and sustainability:**

**Local women and women-led organisations have diverse skills, knowledge and networks that are an enormous asset in humanitarian preparedness, response and recovery work. Yet, a lack of 'humanitarian expertise' and operational capacity challenges limit their full engagement**

It is increasingly acknowledged that small, local organisations face significant challenges during times of rapid scale-up during humanitarian response in terms of their operational capacity.<sup>52</sup> Evidence from across different humanitarian responses also highlights that women-led organisations may often be 'diverted' from their strategic agendas and shift focus to support response efforts.<sup>53</sup> In large part this plays out within a context of unequal power between international agencies with 'relatively high levels of resourcing and authority on the world stage, and local organisations' – this can contribute to 'mission drift'.<sup>54</sup> Local partners operating across the Central Sulawesi response also highlighted that many NGOs and INGOs had the same local implementation partners, which was seen to have placed significant pressure on local actors and contributed to uptake challenges and blockages.<sup>55</sup> New research from the region<sup>56</sup> highlights that there is also often a lack of mutual understanding around the knowledge and skills that exist at a local level versus the expertise contained within the global humanitarian operations and policy community. Evidence has shown that this may also be particularly pronounced in women's protection work.<sup>57</sup>

The women and women-led organisations interviewed for this research highlighted a lack of prior experience of working in humanitarian response. Of note, almost all interviewees described women's limited confidence and there was a consensus that capacity-strengthening was needed to grow their leadership skills in particular. This came directly from local women and women-led organisations on the ground, as well as from INGO, NGO, UN and government representatives at Palu and Jakarta level. Capacity-strengthening was conceptualised as multifaceted, comprising 'hard' skills around operational, financial and grant management, as well as 'softer' skills around

leadership, coordination, negotiation, strategising and alliance-building. Many women working at the local level talked specifically of a desire to learn from other women managing and leading in more senior positions within organisations and the government, working in other parts of the country and the region.

Representatives from several women-led organisations also emphasised that in focusing on meeting new 'humanitarian needs', their longer-term women's rights work, including in areas such as conflict resolution and women's land rights, was put on hold to some extent. Findings from the Central Sulawesi response highlight that there is a critical need to strengthen local partner capacity to respond to the unique scale, pace and demands of humanitarian response, but to do so in a way that respects and utilises organisations' existing skills and experience, and connects to their longer-term gender justice work.

*"My colleagues are overwhelmed. Since the disaster our office has never been closed"*  
(women-led organisation, Palu)

*"Many of the staff that we initially engaged with are from shops and businesses – they do not have a humanitarian background. We really need to do capacity-building, which is not easy in a response"*  
(INGO, Jakarta)

*"We must fight together so that women can build their own skills and confidence. Some women are still not confident and worry if they make a mistake"*  
(women-led organisation, Palu)

**Rhetoric to reality: The central government has championed localisation in the Central Sulawesi response. There is also a ‘supportive policy environment’ for the advancement of women’s rights and protection. However, there is limited connection between the two, as well as limited operationalisation at a local level**

As a disaster-prone context, interviewees for this research highlighted the crucial learning and adaptation that had taken place across the Indonesian government, resulting in the development of new legislation and disaster-dedicated government structures such as the BNPB (Indonesian National Board for Disaster Management), which facilitates national-led preparedness and responses. The ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on disaster management (AHA Centre) was also seen to have played a central role, with OCHA and UN agencies providing complementary support. As outlined, the government responded quickly to establish its leadership role in the Central Sulawesi response, setting restrictions on the nature and scope of international assistance.

While the government of Indonesia has invested in developing a supportive policy and legislative framework for advancing women’s rights and protection, including guidelines developed by the Ministry of Women’s Empowerment and Child Protection in 2018,<sup>58</sup> there has been limited visibility of these commitments within the wider disaster management architecture, as well broader gender considerations within the current Recovery Plan drafting and finalisation process. Interviewees attributed this to a combination of factors, including a lack of expertise, political will and financial resource. Interviewees emphasised therefore, the necessity of implementing a more systematic approach outside of times of disaster to ensure the delivery of these commitments when another disaster strikes.

While there has undoubtedly been a strong rhetorical and policy commitment to localisation at a central government level, interviewees emphasised that the coordination between central and local levels of government had been a key barrier in advancing the articulated needs of women and their communities at a local level. This was notably discussed in relation to the determination of ‘red zones’ and the condition of temporary shelters (‘huntara’) and permanent housing (‘huntab’), whereby women expressed frustration that their voices and perspectives were not taken into consideration. Some of these challenges were blamed on the ‘top-down’ implementation of the construction process that failed to consult communities in advance’.<sup>59</sup> In these cases, the central government was understood to hold the resource and

decision-making power, as opposed to the provincial or district-level authorities. Interviewees emphasised the importance of women and women’s organisations determining the direction of BNPB policy (at the national level) and BPBD (at the provincial level).

“At the government level there is awareness about issues affecting women, but the difficulty is operationalising this”  
(UN agency, Jakarta)

“The coordination is done by the BNPB, but then is not trickled down at district and provincial level”  
(UN agency, Palu)

Despite these challenges, a change in the standard ways of working presents new opportunity and the potential for more locally connected, rights-based programming. For example, for GBV response in IDP contexts, UNFPA functions as a lead of the sub-cluster by default, usually accompanied by an INGO or government body. However, in the case of Central Sulawesi, the government took the primary lead but called on UNFPA for technical support when necessary. Interviewees suggested that the added value of having the (local) government lead this role enabled the forging of stronger connections with the local community with whom relationships were already established, and as such may offer an important model in furthering the localising of response efforts. However, there was consensus across interviewees that there is still a need for technical support from specialist UN agencies and other agencies, particularly in relation to protection, and that beyond a change in process and structure, budget crucially needs to be made available to support this work.

The principles of ‘as local as possible, as international as necessary’ should be upheld as part of these efforts – the Indonesian government and women-led organisations should be enabled to do what they do best, and supported to identify gaps and seek international input as determined by them when necessary.

## 4. RECOMMENDATIONS

As this research highlights, local women and women-led organisations were some of the first actors to mobilise and respond on the ground in Central Sulawesi. These actors leveraged their trusted positions in communities, and existing connections and networks, to move quickly and effectively. They were able to provide key services for the community, including supporting evacuation processes and food and clothes distributions, acting as medical personnel and supporting school reconstruction.

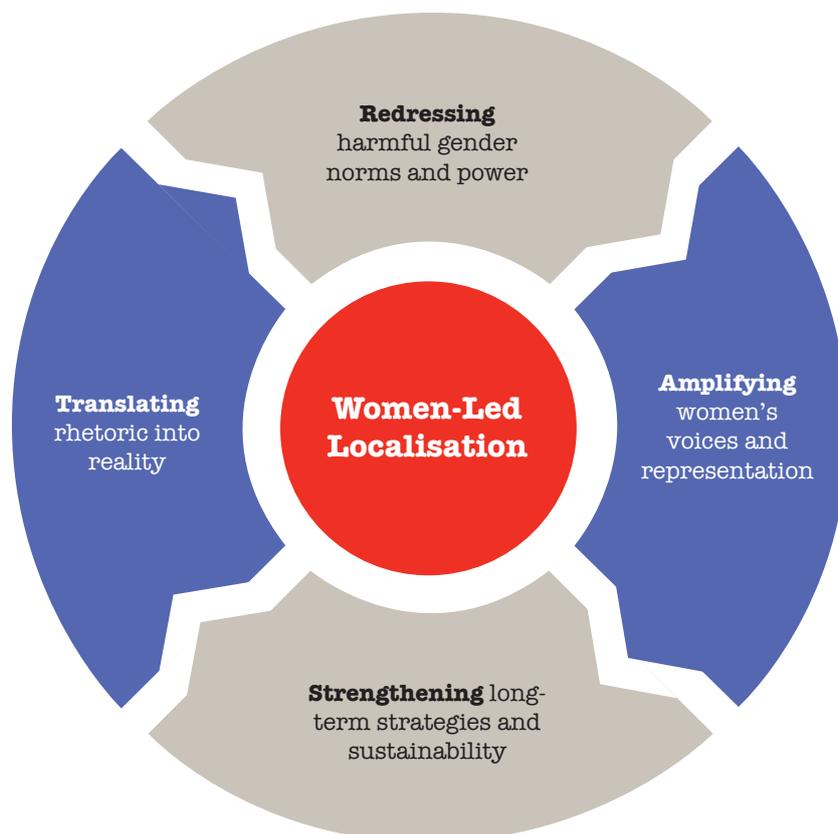
However, as this research also finds, despite a strong narrative of localisation being championed by the Indonesian government, this did not translate into meaningful engagement at the most local of levels. In particular, women and women-led organisations were largely absent from key decision-making spaces and received a small portion of overall response budgets.

Learning from the Central Sulawesi response helps to provide useful insight into broader efforts of women-led localisation. This research emphasises the importance of long-term investment in women's leadership before, during and after disasters strike. The below recommendations are anchored to the following key conclusions:

- It is essential to understand the gendered norms and unequal power relations which shape

women's lives prior, during and after a crisis.

- If women's voices, perspectives and skills are not prioritised within humanitarian architecture and decision-making spaces, their issues are less likely to be understood and responded to, and existing vulnerabilities and inequalities may be reinforced.
- There is a need to strengthen local partner capacity to respond to the unique scale, pace and demands of humanitarian response, but to do so in a way that supports and connects to organisations' valuable skills and longer-term gender justice work.
- Effective dialogue and collaboration should be fostered between governmental and non-governmental organisations operating at both a national and local level, to support the meaningful implementation of policy into practice.



## Findings

## Recommendations

### Redressing harmful gender norms and power.

*It is essential to understand the gendered norms and unequal power relations which shape women's lives prior, during and after crisis.*

### Amplifying women's voices and representation

*If women's voices, perspectives and skills are not prioritised within humanitarian architecture and decision-making spaces, their issues are less likely to be understood and responded to, and existing vulnerabilities and inequalities may be reinforced.*

#### Humanitarian agencies and donors should:

Ensure that needs assessments and ongoing response and recovery planning processes move beyond simply providing gender and age disaggregated data, and are guided by feminist principles,<sup>i</sup> including undertaking rigorous feminist intersectional analysis<sup>ii</sup> that addresses power imbalances, and involving women in data collection, analysis and decision-making throughout the programme.

Prioritise the protection of women and girls at the onset of emergency response and in disaster planning and preparedness. This should involve working with existing women-led organisations to respond to GBV and other protection threats and supporting the establishment of community-based mechanisms for women to drive their own protection needs, as outlined in ActionAid's Women-Led Community Based Protection Approach.<sup>iii</sup> This should include the integration of Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse measures including accessible and clear complaints and feedback mechanisms and expanding existing safe and friendly spaces for women and girls.

Recognise the burden of unpaid and paid care work on women's participation and leadership in humanitarian action, and work with women in preparedness, response and recovery activities to develop and implement practical mechanisms that redistribute these burdens, including childcare services, financial support and the creation of child-inclusive spaces.

Commit to long-term engagement and resilience building<sup>iv</sup> by investing in women's social and economic empowerment through sustainable livelihood-generating opportunities for women and working with communities to address harmful gender norms and shift power relations between men and women, boys and girls. These activities should be integrated as a core part of recovery work and included in future humanitarian programming – rather than seen as a 'development' issue given their impact on gender inclusive humanitarian response.

#### Humanitarian agencies and donors should:

Ensure a critical mass of local women's organisations are meaningfully represented across the cluster system, building on existing women's local networks and platforms. This can be supported by providing practical solutions to women's participation, such as childcare and transport options, by establishing a volunteer 'buddies' cluster-by-cluster system that support the participation of local women-led organisations establishing with UN and INGO Grand Bargain signatories, and expanding the lead of the clusters to a tripartite model with local authorities, UN and local women-led organisations. Efforts should be made to share relevant information about existing humanitarian architecture and global commitments to ensure local women are empowered to meaningfully input into decision making.

Have progressive plans to achieve gender equality and equity in their preparedness, response and recovery teams. This can be supported by building institutional understanding and awareness around gender equality and equity and developing processes and policies to support this work – including specific HR capacity to document and respond to the reported barriers and constraints of women in their staff.

Local actors should be supported with capacity building, mentoring and financial support to step up to leadership positions in the national cluster system (e.g. as co-leads of the GBV Area of Responsibility) and this could be more widely supported by increases or change in core membership base of local actors at global level in UN clusters.

Facilitate and convene women's organisations networks and alliances, including connecting with existing formal and informal structures, with a focus on bringing in excluded and marginalised groups into conversations and processes of the network.<sup>v</sup>

## Strengthening long-term strategies and sustainability

*There is a need to strengthen local partner capacity to respond to the unique scale, pace and demands of humanitarian response, but to do so in a way that supports and connects to organisations' valuable skills and longer-term gender justice work.*

### Humanitarian agencies and donors should:

Collaborate with local women and women-led organisations to develop joint and two-way humanitarian capacity-strengthening plans that include organisational capacity self-assessments, mentoring and leadership skills, feminist spaces for shared learning and knowledge-exchange at a country, regional and global level – drawing on learning and best practice included from the 'Strategic Humanitarian Assessment and Participatory Empowerment' (SHAPE) framework.

Set multi-year flexible and direct funding facilities earmarked for local women-led organisations to engage in emergencies, which provide different tiered options depending on the size and capacity of organisations, and can offer core funding for organisations to prepare for and respond to disasters, as well as continue their vital long-term specialist gender justice work.

Track and report direct and indirect funding to local women-led organisations in emergencies; donors should specify to international humanitarian agencies that supporting local women-led organisations during emergencies is an indicator of success and request to track and report the funding passed to them. Consortia based ways of working should be encouraged through the existing pooled fund mechanism to encourage widescale collaboration and skill sharing.

## Translating rhetoric into reality

*Effective dialogue and collaboration should be fostered between governmental and non-governmental organisations operating at both a national and local level, to support the meaningful implementation of policy into practice.*

### Government actors (in the Indonesian case this includes BNPB and the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management) should:

Be supported with expert capacity-strengthening and technical inputs to help bring a women's rights and gendered lens and approach to their work.

Implement and resource the existing policy and legislative framework for advancing women's rights and protection during future emergencies. The BNPB should encourage and support local women's organisations to continue longer-term social and gender justice work, aligned with their own priorities, as this will be crucial to reducing the increased vulnerabilities faced by women in times of crisis.

Start a dialogue on the role of national disaster management agencies and regional organisations in promoting localisation that gives space, voice and funding to women and women-led organisations, alongside other national actors.

- i. As an organisation, ActionAid is embracing intersectional feminist principles in the workplace not only because they are consistent with what we do, but also because we know that they are vital to the success of our mission. You can find more information on that here: <https://www.actionaid.org.uk/about-us/how-we-practise-feminism-at-work>.
- ii. See Lisle, A. (2018) 'Intersectional Feminist Discussion Toolkit', ActionAid
- iii. For further information on ActionAid's Women-Led Community Based Protection Approach, please see: <https://actionaid.org/publications/2019/our-feminist-approach-protection-emergencies>
- iv. For further information on ActionAid's Resilience Framework, please see: <https://actionaid.org/publications/2016/through-different-lens-actionaids-resilience-framework>
- v. In collaboration with other agencies, ActionAid is a member of the Feminist Humanitarian Network – a global network of women leaders committed to a transformed humanitarian system that promotes a feminist humanitarian agenda: <https://www.feministhumanitariannetwork.org/>

## Endnotes

1. For ActionAid, the term 'women-led organisation' refers to organisations that are led or predominantly composed of women in leadership positions, who work towards advancing gender equality and supporting the needs of women and girls.
2. See Barclay, A., Higelin, M., and Bungcaras, M. (2017) 'On the frontline: catalysing women's leadership in humanitarian action', ActionAid; Lindley-Jones, H. (2018) 'Women responders: Placing local action at the centre of humanitarian protection programming', Care International UK; Lambert, B., Rhodes, F. and Zaaroura, M. (2018) 'A Feminist Approach to Localization: How Canada Can Support the Leadership of Women's Rights Actors in Humanitarian Action'. Oxfam Canada; Fletcher-Wood, E. and Mutandwa, R. (2019) 'Funding a localised, women-led approach to protection from Gender Based Violence: What is the data telling us?', ActionAid
3. Latimir, K. and Mollett, H. (2018) 'Not what she bargained for? Gender and the Grand Bargain', ActionAid and CARE International
4. See Humanitarian Advisory Group and Pujiono Centre (2019) 'Charting the new norm? Local leadership in the first 100 days of the Sulawesi earthquake response', Humanitarian Horizons Practice Paper Series
5. As described and discussed in Barbelet, V. (2018) 'As local as possible, as international as necessary: Understanding capacity and complementarity in humanitarian action'. Humanitarian Policy Group at the Overseas Development Institute (ODI). At the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit the Secretary General called for humanitarian action to be 'as local as possible, as international as necessary' (United Nations, 2016, One humanity: shared responsibility. World Humanitarian Summit Report, 01376 A/70, February, 3–4) a statement which triggered initiatives, processes and debates within the humanitarian community as a means to find what actions and reforms were needed to allow a more local humanitarian response. Following these discussions, ODI produced a report to examine the debates around capacity strengthening and collaboration, which examined and the opportunities for and obstacles to harnessing the capacity of and forging more effective complementarity among local, national, regional and international actors responding to humanitarian crises.
6. Ibid.
7. See Yermo, F. (2017) 'Promoting localised, women-led approaches to humanitarian responses', ActionAid
8. See for example Majid, N., Abdurahman, K., Poole, L. and Willitts-King, B. (2018) 'Funding to local humanitarian actors. Somalia case study', Overseas Development Institute (ODI)
9. See Urquhart, A. and Tüchel, L. (2018) 'Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2018'. Development Initiatives
10. See Yermo, F. (2017) 'Promoting localised, women-led approaches to humanitarian responses', ActionAid
11. See International Council of Voluntary Agencies (2017) 'Grand Bargain: Aide Memoire Gender Mainstreaming', International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA)
12. Ibid.
13. Latimir, K. and Mollett, H. (2018) 'Not what she bargained for? Gender and the Grand Bargain', ActionAid and CARE International
14. Ruparel, S. (2019) 'Why ActionAid promotes women's leadership in emergencies. ActionAid. Blog available at: <https://actionaid.org/opinions/2019/why-actionaid-promotes-womens-leadership-emergencies>
15. See Barclay, A., Higelin, M., and Bungcaras, M. (2017) 'On the frontline: catalysing women's leadership in humanitarian action', ActionAid; Lindley-Jones, H. (2018) 'Women responders: Placing local action at the centre of humanitarian protection programming', Care International UK; Lambert, B., Rhodes, F. and Zaaroura, M. (2018) 'A Feminist Approach to Localization: How Canada Can Support the Leadership of Women's Rights Actors in Humanitarian Action'. Oxfam Canada
16. There is no global reporting system, which tracks how much humanitarian funding goes to local women-led organisations. While there have been increases in tracking funds to local actors, and there is some level of disaggregation across sectors, we do not disaggregate this information systematically – new research finds that in particular women-led organisations working on GBV prevention and response receive minimal direct funding – for example see: Marsh, M. and Blake, M. (2019) 'Where is the Money? How the humanitarian system is failing in its commitments to end violence against women and girls' International Rescue Committee and VOICE. See also Fletcher-Wood, E. and Mutandwa, R. (2019) 'Funding a localised, women-led approach to protection from Gender Based Violence: What is the data telling us?', ActionAid
17. For example, as of February 2019 only 9 out of 27 UN Humanitarian Coordinators (33%) are women – see Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) 'Humanitarian Coordinators'. Available at: [https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/information\\_products\\_-\\_feb\\_2019\\_-\\_list\\_of\\_current\\_hcs.pdf](https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/information_products_-_feb_2019_-_list_of_current_hcs.pdf)
18. The World Risk Index states the risk of disaster in consequence of extreme natural events for 172 of the world's countries. It is calculated on a country-by-country basis through the multiplication of exposure and vulnerability. Available at: <https://weltrisikobericht.de/english-2/>
19. See Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (GDFRR) data. Available at: <https://www.gdrr.org/en/indonesia>
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21. World Vision (2018) '2018 Indonesia earthquake: Facts and FAQs'. Available at: <https://www.wvi.org/blogpost/2018-indonesia-earthquake-facts-and-faqs>
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23. Humanitarian Advisory Group and Pujiono Centre (2019) 'Charting the new norm? Local leadership in the first 100 days of the Sulawesi earthquake response', Humanitarian Horizons Practice Paper Series
24. Ibid.
25. Bagshaw, S. (2012) 'OCHA on Message: Humanitarian Principles'. United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)
26. O'Neil, T. and Domingo, P. (2016) 'Women and power. Overcoming barriers to leadership and influence'. London: Overseas Development Institute
27. Ibid.
28. The term 'gender norms' refers to informal rules and shared social expectations that distinguish expected behaviour on the basis of gender, Marcus, R., Harper, C., Brodbeck, S., Page, E. (2015) 'Social norms, gender norms and adolescent girls: a brief Guide'. London: Overseas Development Institute
29. O'Neil, T. and Domingo, P. (2016) 'Women and power. Overcoming barriers to leadership and influence'. London: Overseas Development Institute
30. See Yunma, A., Febriany, V., Syukri, M. and Pereznieta, P. (2012) 'The Politics of gender and Social Protection in Indonesia: Opportunities and challenges for a transformative Approach', London: Overseas Development Institute.
31. See Cole, H. (2018) 'CARE Rapid Gender Analysis Sulawesi Earthquake and Tsunami Indonesia Version 2'. CARE International
32. According to the Indonesia - National Labour Force Survey 2009 there is a gender gap in almost all employment indicators—64% of women are also in the informal sectors and around 75% of overseas migrant workers are women and in 2008 most of them worked as domestic helpers")
33. See UN Women Global Database on Violence against Women <http://evaw-global-database.unwomen.org/en/countries/asia/indonesia>
34. See Cole, H. (2018) 'CARE Rapid Gender Analysis Sulawesi Earthquake and Tsunami Indonesia Version 2'. CARE International
35. Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) (2018) 'The Gender Handbook for Humanitarian Action' referenced in Lafrenière, J., Sweetman, C., and Thylin, T. (2019) 'Introduction: gender, humanitarian action and crisis response' - introductory article to

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36. See Cole, H. (2018) 'CARE Rapid Gender Analysis Sulawesi Earthquake and Tsunami Indonesia Version 2'. CARE International
37. Ibid.
38. See O'Neil, T., Domingo, P. (2016) 'Women and power: overcoming barriers to leadership and influence'. London: Overseas Development Institute
39. Ibid.
40. O'Neil, T., Domingo, P. (2016) 'Women and power: overcoming barriers to leadership and influence'. London: Overseas Development Institute. p.23. Available at: <https://www.odi.org/publications/10309-women-and-power-overcoming-barriers-leadership-and-influence>
41. Ibid.
42. Ibid.
43. As discussed by CARE 'implementing a gender-transformative humanitarian response, however, is not without risks; challenging the root causes of gender inequality means challenging existing power relations and social norms, which can result in backlash. Due to their position, external actors place this risk on individual women. Engaging with women responders earlier in a crisis, and in a more meaningful way, may help the sector understand when it is or is not appropriate to pursue transformational change, and how to do so in a way that minimises risks. As those who are often at direct risk themselves, women responders should be supported to choose which and what level of risk they respond to' cited in: Lindley-Jones, H. (2018) 'Women responders. Placing local actions at the centre of humanitarian protection programming', Care International UK, p.28
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47. Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC). Available at: <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/>
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53. Anderson, K. (2017) 'Now is the time: Research on Gender Justice, Conflict and Fragility in the Middle East and North Africa', Oxfam and International Alert
54. See Lafrenière, J., Sweetman, C., and Thylin, T. (2019) 'Introduction: gender, humanitarian action and crisis response' - introductory article to Gender & Development issue 27(2) Humanitarian Action and Crisis Response
55. Discussed in the DEC's Real Time Review: Disasters Emergency Committee (2018) 'Real-Time Response Review of the 2018 Indonesia Tsunami Appeal', Disasters Emergency Committee
56. Research led by ActionAid, The Huairou Commission and Monash University, further details here: ActionAid 'Gender Responsive Alternatives for Climate Change', ActionAid Australia. Available at: <https://actionaid.org.au/programs/gender-responsive-alternatives-for-climate-change/>
57. Lindley-Jones, H. (2018) 'Women responders: Placing local action at the centre of humanitarian protection programming', Care International UK
58. Dipublikasikan, P. (2019) 'Rumah Ramah Perempuan Cegah Perampasan Alami Kekerasan Berbasis Gender Dalam Bencana' Kemenpppa. Available at: <https://www.kemenpppa.go.id/index.php/page/read/29/2299/women-friendly-space-prevent-pervents-experience-violence-based-gender-in-disaster>
59. DEC's Real Time Review: Disasters Emergency Committee (2018) 'Real-Time Response Review of the 2018 Indonesia Tsunami Appeal', Disasters Emergency Committee

## Box endnotes

- i. See <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/grand-bargain>
- ii. See [http://media.ifrc.org/grand\\_bargain\\_localisation/](http://media.ifrc.org/grand_bargain_localisation/)
- iii. For further details of the project and links to relevant publications, please visit: <https://www.christianaid.org.uk/about-us/programmes/accelerating-localisation-through-partnerships>
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- xi. CARE Rapid Gender Sulawesi Earthquake and Tsunami Indonesia Version 2. (2018), CARE Indonesia
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- xiv. You can find more information on ActionAid's response here: <https://www.actionaid.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/emergencies-disasters-humanitarian-response/tsunami-in-indonesia-2018>



Women cooking as part of a livelihoods programme in cornfield farming in Rogo Village, Sigi District.

Credit: ActionAid

Credit: Agatha Roulina Tambunan/ActionAid

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