EMPOWERED AID
Transforming Gender and Power Dynamics in Humanitarian Aid Delivery

The Global Women's Institute
THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

OUR APPROACH

Since its magnitude first came to light in 2002, the aid community's focus on addressing sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) has primarily rested on establishing reporting mechanisms and punitive actions against perpetrators of such violence. In addition to response, accountability for ending SEA must include **pro-active measures to mitigate risk and prevent abuse** from occurring. Since 2018, Empowered Aid has:

- **Conducted rigorous and participatory research** on the ways the delivery of humanitarian aid (including food, non-food items, shelter, water, fuel, cash & vouchers) may increase risks of SEA within affected populations, and how to reduce those risks.
- **Shared power with refugee women and girls**, their communities, and emerging women researchers from some of the largest refugee-hosting countries in the world, to ensure prevention of SEA is led by those most affected by it.
- **Partnered with local and international humanitarian aid actors** to develop, document and disseminate tools and resources for safer aid distributions.

BUILDING THE EVIDENCE (2018-2021)

In the first three years, Empowered Aid supported the creation or adaptation of aid delivery models that **actively work to reduce power disparities and give women and girls a sustained voice in how aid is delivered**. It utilised participatory action research [1], a method that proactively acknowledges and addresses power imbalances between the affected population & researchers/ humanitarians, and was grounded in formative ethnographic work with refugee women and girls, to safely take an active role in asking and answering questions about their own lives.

Refugee women & girls formulated sets of recommendations for safer aid distributions. These were then tested in small-scale pilots in ongoing humanitarian aid operations in Uganda and Lebanon. Using our research findings on SEA risk, we collaboratively adapted distribution monitoring tools — such as safety audits, surveys, and focus groups–to proactively monitor for SEA and address risks as soon as they arise [2] . The Empowered Aid team of refugee, national, and international researchers & partners also created the **free, online Empowered Aid course** to reach aid actors globally. The course is available in English, Arabic, Spanish, and French at: bit.ly/ea-course

1 Potts A, Fattal L, Hedge E, Hallak F, and Reese A. (2020). *Empowered Aid: Participatory Action Research with Refugee Women & Girls to Better Prevent Sexual Exploitation and Abuse- Lebanon Results Report*. Washington, DC: The George Washington University. Potts A, Kolli H, Hedge E and Ullman C. (2020). *Empowered Aid: Participatory Action Research with Refugee Women & Girls to Better Prevent Sexual Exploitation and Abuse—Uganda Results Report*. Washington, DC: The George Washington University.

2 The Global Women's Institute. (2021). *Empowered Aid: Toolkit for Planning and Monitoring Safer Distributions*. Washington, DC: The George Washington University. Also available in *French*, *Spanish*, and *Arabic*. Accompanying materials in all languages available *here*.

SCALING UP AND SCALING OUT (2021-2024)

Currently, Empowered Aid is building on the participatory research and piloting findings in Uganda & Lebanon to **support aid actors to implement scalable, evidence-based models for safer aid distributions**. By taking a participatory, ecological approach, we support international and local aid actors to **strengthen the enabling environment for safe access to humanitarian aid for all crisis-affected people**, including women & girls in all their diversity. Incorporating participatory approaches and findings into standard distribution monitoring tools increases **accountability for the concerns of those most affected by SEA to be heard, acted upon, and used to measure progress**. Increased accountability to affected people facilitates the sharing of power between international & local aid actors, and the communities they serve, thus contributing to more equitable relationships for violence prevention.

Specifically, Empowered Aid undertakes this work through:
- **Engaging local, community-based aid actors** in understanding & contextualizing findings on SEA risks and recommendations to prevent them within their programming contexts;
- **Scaling up the interventions arising from completed research** in Uganda & Lebanon to a range of types of aid, vulnerable groups, and response settings across East Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia (specifically in Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, and Bangladesh); and
- **Scaling out proven processes for capacity building, mentorship & technical accompaniment** to a global cadre of protection & non-protection aid workers to design, implement, monitor, evaluate and advocate SEA prevention throughout aid distribution and delivery cycles in emergency and protracted emergency settings.

CORE ACTIVITIES AND TIMELINES

Year 1
- Better understand the ways in which distribution of aid in emergencies may create or reinforce opportunities for SEA of women & girls.
  » *Participatory research with refugee women & girls.*

Year 2
- Apply and test refugee women and girls' recommendations for improving distribution mechanisms.
  » *Implementation science, pilot tests.*

Year 3
- Disseminate findings, and facilitate networking and online training led by women and girl refugee researchers.
  » *Research uptake, dissemination, and online course*

Year 4
- Expand partnerships with local & international aid actors in Uganda, Lebanon, & Bangladesh to further contextualize findings & tools to new contexts and types of aid.
  » *Launch Empowered Aid online course & discussions.*

Year 5 & 6
- Contextualise and adapt SEA risk reduction findings to new contexts in 3 regions.
- Share learnings across countries & regions through peer-led training and learning events and expand online course.

Ongoing
- Document a set of scalable models for safe aid distributions and continue to share guidelines, tools and other resources freely.
- Train a cadre of aid workers to provide technical support and implementation guidance for reducing SEA risks.