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IMPLEMENTING GENDER EQUALITY COMMITMENTS IN PRACTICE

Case examples of how DanChurchAid works with
gender equality in our global work



INTRODUCTION

Gender equality and women's empowerment is a long-term strategic priority for DanChurchAid (DCA) and integral to our Human Rights based approach. DCA has worked on gender equality for decades, for example by promoting systemic and sustainable change to support the social, political, and economic empowerment of women, by enhancing women's opportunities for leadership and decision-making, by addressing gender norms and by engaging with men and faith actors as agents of change for gender equality.

DCA works across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, in contexts which are characterised by shrinking civic space, climate change, displacement, conflict and human rights violations in online and offline spaces. Our approach to working with gender equality and women's empowerment must therefore be diverse and must reflect and address various and rapidly changing contexts.

This document presents, selected cases from programme countries, to illustrate how DCA works in practice to implement our commitments on gender equality in *very different* contexts and through various thematic and strategic interventions.

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ENHANCING WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP TO STRENGTHEN LOCAL COMMUNITIES: PALESTINE

Communities in Palestine face a multitude of social, economic, and political risks due to armed conflict and systemic discrimination. Palestinian women and girls experience even more levels of discrimination due to restrictive gender norms, harmful practices, and patriarchal structures. This affects them both socially, economically, and politically, and women have limited opportunities for making decisions that affect their lives, having social interactions and participating in public life.

In DCA, we are committed to contribute to the empowerment of women, as well as the general resilience and development of communities. This is done in Palestine by promoting women's local leadership in crisis-affected communities through the *Women-Led Crisis Response approach (WLCR)*. With this approach, DCA facilitates a space where local actors design their responses, make decisions and engage with local authorities. These groups include members from all society groups and are important in providing women a platform to claim their rights and leadership.



Participants of a training.
Photo: Nils Carstensen/L2GP



Members of the protection group.
Photo: Nils Carstensen/L2GP

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Being part of the Community Resilience Enhancement Committee has changed our role as women in the community, we are empowered and respected in our community.

Young woman from the community.

With men and women collaborating to organise their work in mutual care for the community, the WLCR approach contributes to challenging gender norms. In the beginning, male community members were critical of women's active roles, but as they witness the benefit and importance of women's participation in decision-making and crisis response, they became more receptive to female leadership: *“Being part of the Community Resilience Enhancement Committee has changed our role as women in the community, we are empowered and respected in our community. We stop in the street to respond to men's questions. This was impossible in the past.”* – Young woman from the community.

This project has cultivated women's agency, influence and negotiation power, and women have enhanced their capacity to enhance the protection of their communities against the impacts of crisis and human rights violations. This project is an example of what a gender transformative humanitarian response can look like in practice.

STRENGTHENING NETWORKING OF WOMEN-LED ORGANISATIONS IN THE HUMANITARIAN SECTOR: UGANDA

Women-led organisations in the humanitarian sector in Uganda face many difficulties in accessing decision-making, leadership and funding. Actually, women only make up 10% of the humanitarian leadership in Uganda, which among other reasons, is due to a patriarchal view on leadership and limited opportunities for these organisations to access funding and influence. During the COVID-19 pandemic, women-led and women's rights organisations were the first to have their funding withdrawn and having to let staff go.

Nevertheless, these organisations are often the ones who deliver on programs directly tailored for women and girls, addressing for example gender-based violence, making them very important for gender equality in Uganda, also in humanitarian response.



Panel from Women's Summit
Photo: DCA Uganda

In Uganda, only 10% of humanitarian positions are led by women.



To enhance the voice and influence of women-led organisations in the humanitarian space and contribute to networking and capacity sharing between these actors, DCA facilitated a networking project, where women-led organisations came together to share experiences, needs and approaches to enhance their role in humanitarian action. This led to a Women's Summit in Kampala, which was planned and executed by local organisations and Charter 4 Change (C4C) in Uganda with support from DCA.

The main focus of the Women's Summit was to create a space for dialogue between Ugandan women-led and women's rights organisations, the Ugandan government, donors and international actors about the role of women in the humanitarian system. Topics included approaches to enhance a fair distribution of power and resources between diverse actors. Women shared their success stories as well as challenges as frontline humanitarian workers. The Summit was a great success and received attention from both local media, state actors and ambassadors. This is an example of how DCA supports locally led advocacy to push for women's rights as well as a more just humanitarian system.

COMBATting ONLINE GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE, HARASSMENT AND CENSORSHIP OF WOMEN

All over the world, women experience violence and harassment online. DCA has carried out an analysis of women human rights defenders' experiences with online violence, hate speech and harassment, and found that women are 27 times more exposed to online harassment than men. Examples include stereotypical gender prejudices, sexual comments, censorship, and targeted gendered attacks on politically active women. Online violence and harassment are often used to silence women in politics, which is a problem both at the individual level and for democracy as a whole.

A DanChurchAid study has shown that women are 27 times more exposed to online violence, hate speech or harassment than men.



*A full conference room in the UN building in New York
Photo: Kira Ugaz-Simonsen*



DCA, along with other likeminded actors, has worked to increase the knowledge of these violations and to work together to combat online gender-based violence. An important action was the engagement during the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in New York in March 2023, where DCA with the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs hosted a high-level side event to share learnings from DCA's report and facilitate a multistakeholder dialogue around this topic. The report documents how politically active women suffer online accusations of infidelity, and experience personal information being shared without consent. The report also provided recommendations to multiple stakeholders on how to act together against online violence and harassment, including the need for content moderation on digital platforms.

The side event panel included civil society actors from Uganda, Palestine and the US, as well as a representative from the tech sector. This multistakeholder panel was made possible due to DCA's long term evidence-based advocacy efforts in Denmark, the US and beyond. The stakeholders discussed, how the tech sector and states have a responsibility to work together to fight online gender-based violence and harassment of women human rights defenders. The event and DCA's report attracted attention in Danish media, and the event was an important space for strengthening alliances and shared commitments between the multiple stakeholders.

PROTECTING THE RIGHTS OF GENDER MINORITIES: CAMBODIA

Promoting gender equality is not only about men and women, boys and girls. DCA has a strong commitment to protecting the rights of people with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC). In Cambodia, people with diverse SOGIESC face serious barriers to social services, such as obtaining identification documents and registering for the “ID Poor Programme”, which entitles a person to free health services. One example of an issue is that the programme does not cover a same-sex partner’s health treatment. This is due to the lack of a formal marriage certificate, which in Cambodia cannot be given to couples of the same sex. Same-sex couples are also not allowed to adopt.

People with diverse SOGIESC in Cambodia are only experiencing discrimination in the legal system, they are also socially marginalised. One transgender man explains that: *“Some parents absolutely discriminate against LGBT children which leads to ignore them and even expel their children from home”*. Many cases of violence towards individuals with diverse SOGIESC have also been seen in Cambodia.



A transgender man participating in the project and his wife.
Photo: © FolkeKirkens Yod/Help

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Through these activities I have gained more respect in the village after starting my own business.

Som Sen, a trans-gender man



Channa, a trans woman from Cambodia participating in a workshop.
Photo: © Folkekirkens Nødhjælp

To promote SOGIESC rights, DCA's Cambodian partner organisation NGO-CEDAW supports diverse SOGIESC groups with knowledge, networking opportunities and skills for them to advocate for their rights, increased safety and access to social services. The approaches of NGO-CEDAW include training human right defenders to facilitate support groups, facilitate network-building camps for activists, support exhibition of artworks that raise public awareness and sponsor university debate competitions on issues of people with diverse SOGIESC.

The project also supports individuals with diverse SOGIESC to establish small businesses to serve their local community. One individual who participated in the project is Som Sen, a trans-gender man, who explains how they through these activities have gained more respect in the village after starting their own business. The project has thus both supported individuals' access to justice and opportunities and increased general awareness and support for the rights of people with diverse SOGIESC in the communities.

DIGITAL SOLUTIONS FOR WOMEN'S FINANCIAL INCLUSION: UGANDA

Women in Uganda generally have limited influence on community and household financial decision-making and face challenges in expanding their economic activities due to for example household and care responsibilities and gender norms. Women further have limited access to financial inclusion, for example obtaining a loan. This can be due to a lack of identity papers and is also caused by land and property, which can be used as guarantee, being almost exclusively owned by men. This is both challenging community development, resilience, women's empowerment and financial inclusion.

As a key approach to women's economic and social empowerment, DCA has supported *Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs)* for a long time. A VSLA is a micro-finance model, where saving groups are formed at community level. These groups support women to save money and provide affordable small loans. The groups are open to everyone but consist primarily of women, as women make up 84% of members in Uganda's approximately 300.000 VSLAs. The VSLAs are important to facilitate women's financial inclusion and entrepreneurship, as well as important social spaces, where women can share issues and discuss solutions relevant to them and acquire new skills and decision-making experience.



VSLA group members during a savings meeting.
Photo: Jjumba Martin
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VSLAs are open to everyone but consist primarily of women, as women make up 84% of members in Uganda's approximately 300.000 VSLAs



Women participating in VSLA group in a savings meeting.
Photo: Jjumba Martin
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However, VSLAs have experienced some challenges in ensuring safe financial management and link members to formal financial service providers. As a solution, DCA in collaboration with the Ugandan fin-tech company Ensibuuko, launched an initiative to digitalise bookkeeping in the VSLAs and thereby improve their access to credit.

Through a cloud-based management platform existing paper-based documents were digitalized. Additionally, members could easily demonstrate their financial track record through a mobile application. As such, the app has improved the opportunities for VSLA members without a bank account to get loans. In one of the groups, the use of the app led to doubling the income among the members. This approach is not without challenges, as many women have limited access to and experience with using phones, however the potential of digitalization to enhance women's financial inclusion is a clear learning from this intervention.

Women had a strong role in facilitating the project, signing up as "Digital Champions", who would onboard and train other members and promote the use of the app. This had contributed not only to women's financial inclusion and skills building but also to women's empowerment in the community.

GENDER RESPONSIVE PEACE BUILDING: CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

The Central African Republic (CAR) has faced recurrent socio-political crises and violent conflict for decades. Since 2012, political violence has increased and is worsened by insecurity and poverty. During the December 2020 elections a new wave of violence hit the country. More than half of the population, around 2.8 million people were in need of humanitarian assistance. Among the pressured communities facing food insecurity and displacement, women were particularly vulnerable and marginalized. Early marriage and young motherhood are prevalent in the CAR, and women are often confined to their homes due to restricting patriarchal norms and a substantial burden of household and care work. Meanwhile, the efforts to resolve the conflict were dominated by elites and had little focus on local causes for conflict.



*Women and men participate in a peace building workshop.
Photo: Kira Petersen*



*Man facilitating a workshop.
Photo: Kira Petersen*

DCA implemented a project that envisioned to contribute to the national peace process in the CAR by strengthening and promoting peacebuilding capacities

Apart from supporting communities in the CAR with humanitarian aid, DCA further expanded its role as a supporter of local peacebuilding initiatives in the country. Together with local and international partners, DCA implemented a project that envisioned to contribute to the national peace process in the CAR by strengthening and promoting peacebuilding capacities of local citizens and authorities in five regions. The aim was for them to better withstand local conflict, and to jointly seek greater engagement in inclusive peace efforts.

The project focused on including women in the processes, especially young and marginalised women, in local, regional and national peacebuilding efforts. This was done by systematically integrating gender and conflict sensitivity assessments and facilitating trainings in women's inclusion in local peace building. DCA and partners were able to challenge gender norms in the rural communities and in local peacebuilding initiatives. This led women from the rural Fulani communities, who are often marginalised and excluded from community activities, to join trainings, discussions and advocacy efforts without having to fear for their safety.

Through this project, women were empowered to become key actors in local peacebuilding activities. The results of the project showed that local, inclusive peacebuilding groups have been very efficient in promoting inclusive and needs-based dialogue for conflict solution and the prevention of violence. Furthermore, this has contributed to women's overall participation in the community and feeling of improved safety.

GENDER RESPONSIVE CLIMATE ADAPTATION: NEPAL

In Nepal, many male members of the family migrate for work outside of the country, leaving female family members behind to take care of the family and the agricultural farmland, which is highly vulnerable to climate-related shocks and stresses. Their livelihoods are based on agriculture, and women have to take care of the farm as well as children and other family members, making it very difficult to seek employment or improved financial opportunities.

At the same time, farmers in Nepal are seriously challenged by the impacts of climate change. In recent years, drought has becoming an increasing problem, and when it finally rains, the rainfall is so heavy that it leads to floods and landslides that destroy homes, land and crops. This is affecting many families financially and psychologically; especially the women who are often solely responsible for providing food security to their family. Nepalese farmers urgently need to adopt climate adaptation practices that are gender just, to enhance their resilience, and to secure their families' livelihoods and nutrition.



*Farmer from Fachimtar who has recieved a greenhouse for climate resilient crops.
Photo: DCA Nepal*

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I have more confidence in speaking in front of others. Before joining this group, I barely dared to introduce myself.

Young woman from the Women's Group.



DCA is therefore working with partners to support the adoption of gender just climate adaptation methods while promoting women's leadership in climate adaptation management. This work is for example taking place in the small community of Fachimtar. Here, DCA and partners have supported communities in establishing climate adaptation solutions, such as greenhouse tunnels, and drip irrigation water systems. These solutions have provided women farmers with opportunities to increase vegetable production and marketing, allowing them to earn additional income. At the same time, women farmer's groups have been established and trained, and they are taking a leading role in promoting adaptation methods among the farmer families in Fachimtar. The groups also double as savings groups, incentivizing women farmers to save regularly and take loans to invest in their business.

Women's leadership has ensured that solutions are designed and distributed in a gender-just way that responds to women's needs, leading to women farmer's enhanced resilience and women's empowerment in the community. This has ensured women's financial independence and allowed them to contribute to their family's nutrition, education and well-being. In addition to this, these women's groups have become important spaces for women to share stories, learn from each other, and receive training in human rights, climate change, gender-based violence, or literacy. One woman explains: *"I have more confidence in speaking in front of others. Before joining this group, I barely dared to introduce myself"*.

Climate change is impacting women more than men, yet women are often not part of the solutions. This project in Nepal is an example of efficient community-driven climate adaptation where women have a central role, leading their communities to more inclusive and gender-responsive resilience solutions.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE PREVENTION AND RESPONSE AMONG REFUGEES: BANGLADESH

Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh is the biggest refugee settlement in the World. After fleeing from violence in Myanmar, nearly one million Rohingyas are living in the camps since 2017. Conditions are precarious, security for the refugees is scarce, and gender-based violence is extremely common. One in four Rohingya women and girls in Cox's Bazar has suffered gender-based violence. Even so, in a relatively conservative society, gender-based violence is a big taboo. Furthermore, women's and girls' lives are characterised by early marriage, economic deprivation and a very limited space to participate in decision-making.

Due to long-term engagement and dialogue, the imams became key supporters, encouraging women to seek service provisions.



*One of DCA's Women and Girls Centre.
Credit: The Sletting Jakobsen*



Since 2018, DCA has implemented an ambitious programme to prevent and respond to gender-based violence. The programme has combined gender transformative community approaches, engaging men and boys, building up safe spaces and case management services for gender-based violence survivors, and supporting education and livelihood opportunities for women and girls. One of the projects builds the capacity of female Rohingya Youth Mentors, recruited from within the community, to conduct life skills training for adolescent girls, while providing the opportunity for young women's leadership, peer mentoring, and group self-protection. Through the programme, 32 community-based protection groups have also been formed, which work with communities to enhance safety and protection.

A key strategy has been to work strategically with local imams, who have a lot of influence on norms and convictions in the Rohingya community. Before, these religious leaders were skeptical of the programme, advising women and girls to not use the crisis centers. But due to long-term engagement and dialogue, where both DCA and the imams learned new ways to interpret religious texts, the imams became key supporters, encouraging women to seek service provisions. When the Covid-19 pandemic closed down the camps, not allowing for DCA to work inside the refugee settlement, the imams took over the management and promotion of the services.

This programme is one of DCA's most important examples of a gender transformative approach to gender-based violence prevention and response, with the involvement of faith actors as agents of change.

Want to learn more?

Go to danchurchaid.org to read more about
DCA's gender work.



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