

# **Climate action, Gender and Displacement in the Arab Region: Turning adversity into opportunity**

**Discussion paper  
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# 1. Introduction

Climate change has resulted in unpredictable weather patterns across the Arab states which have included droughts, floods, dust storms and intense heat waves<sup>1</sup>, all of which are becoming more severe and frequent. Extremely hot temperatures were recorded in several places across the region in 2016 such as a high of 53.9 degrees Celsius in Basra, Iraq, while unusually high temperatures were also reported in Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, and the United Arab Emirates; in July 2020, 46 degrees Celsius were recorded in Damascus, Syria. This rise in temperatures has continued and, together with other effects of climate change, the potential impact on human development could be devastating.

As a risk multiplier, climate change impacts exacerbate existing vulnerabilities, fragile conditions, and widens social and economic inequalities due to the differentiated adaptive capacities among diverse social groups. Although conflict and forced human displacement have been constant features in the Arab States, becoming more protracted over the last decade, their convergence with climate-related factors has contributed to an increasing number of forcibly displaced populations, both within and across borders in recent years. Within this context, women and girls make up around 50 per cent of “any refugee, internally displaced or stateless population, and those who are unaccompanied, pregnant, heads of households, disabled or elderly are especially vulnerable<sup>2</sup>.” Protracted emergencies due to an overlapping of conflict drivers, including climate shocks, are often more severe in contexts where political and societal injustices and inequalities exist. Such contexts have highlighted the need to address the root causes of the emergency

while drawing a path out of fragility towards recovery and sustainable development in which gender equality is a prerequisite. In doing so, results may address the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.

In these environments where inequalities are already significant, the impacts of climate change will further amplify those risks for those who are at the bottom of the scale. Due to historic gender inequality coupled with the status of displacement and impacts of climate change, women refugees/Internally Displaced People (IDPs) in the Arab states are among the least equipped social groups. Furthermore, the outbreak of the COVID-19 global pandemic has reinforced the inequalities and dire socio-economic conditions of vulnerable groups including refugees/IDPs. The overwhelming response to this global health emergency has focused on tackling the health consequences, and has in many instances emphasized the here and now, sometimes at the expense of other persistent and equally complex challenges such as climate change. However, COVID-19 could present an opportunity to recover better and “greener” if some of the underlying causes of gender and other inequalities are addressed.

This working paper aims to unpack the interconnection between climate change and vulnerable women who are refugees/IDPs (hereafter referred to as “women refugees/IDPs”). In doing so, it will also reflect on the additional socio-economic burdens placed on this particular segment of the population due to COVID-19. The analysis is expected to lead to a set of recommendations to understand how climate change related initiatives can become part of longer-term solutions that respond to both the needs of, and empower women refugees/IDPs, while also contributing to addressing climate change challenges, including from the perspective of climate and human security. The recommendations may also point to areas where further work is required to better understand the intersection between climate change and women refugees/IDPs.

1 Climate Change-Related Statistics in the Arab Region A Proposed Set of Indicators Special Issue of the Compendium of Environment Statistics in the Arab Region 2017. ESCWA 2017  
<https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/publications/files/compendium-environment-statistics-arab-region-2016-2017-english.pdf>

2 <https://www.unhcr.org/women.html#:~:text=Women%20and%20girls%20make%20up,or%20elderly%20are%20especially%20vulnerable.>



## 2. Climate-Security Nexus in the Arab States

Climate change has emerged as a complex and increasingly important phenomenon exacerbating poverty and human insecurity in the Arab region. Human insecurity can be understood in terms of the exposure and risks of an individual or community to food insecurity, water scarcity, loss of livelihoods, health epidemics, natural disasters, and conflict, among others, all of which can be exacerbated by the impacts of climate change. Indeed, growing risks to food, water and ecosystem services in the natural sphere (drought, ground water scarcity, land degradation) and in the social sphere (poverty, social instability, displacement) are being exacerbated by rising temperatures and increased climate variability. In causing greater levels of water insecurity, reduced agricultural productivity, and fragility of land and ecosystem services, climate change is now increasing social vulnerability, exacerbating conflict and triggering displacement in the region.

The continuing COVID-19 pandemic is likely to put additional burdens on the ability of the state, and host communities of IDPs and refugees to cope with existing challenges combined with the fall-out from this global crisis. According to an analysis by the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), the pandemic and its associated fall-out in the economic and social sectors may push as many as 8.3 million people below the poverty line due to a loss of employment and livelihood options, as well as a decrease in access and availability to social services due to a shrinking of fiscal space<sup>1</sup>. In the context of the Arab region where climate change intersects with conflict and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, recovery from crises, resumption of development, and ultimately, achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030 will be hampered. The consequences of this triple crisis will be felt particularly starkly by refugees, IDPs, and in particular women within those groups.

<sup>1</sup> UN ESCWA, Impact of the Global COVID-19 Pandemic on the Arab Region, March 2020.

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**“Climate disruption is a crisis amplifier and multiplier. Where climate change dries up rivers, reduces harvests, destroys critical infrastructure, and displaces communities, it exacerbates the risks of instability and conflict. [...]**

**The impacts of this crisis are greatest where fragility and conflicts have weakened coping mechanisms; where people depend on natural capital like forests and fish stocks for their livelihoods; and where women – who bear the greatest burden of the climate emergency – do not enjoy equal rights.”**

**Secretary-General Antonio Guterres,  
February 2021**

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### 3. Climate Change and Forced Displacement in Arab States

The Arab States region is vulnerable to climate change, and one of the most severe manifestations of this is the worsening impacts on water security. With 18 out of 22 states considered to be below the renewable freshwater resource scarcity threshold of 1,000 m<sup>3</sup> per capita, and 13 countries below the absolute water scarcity threshold of 500 m<sup>3</sup> per capita, it is classified as the most water-scarce regions in the world<sup>1</sup>.

According to the Climate Change Adaptation Report<sup>2</sup> climate change stressors, such as those related to water-scarcity, are exacerbating existing socio-economic challenges in the region. A growing population and trends towards often unplanned urbanization are putting stress on existing natural resources, which many communities rely on for their day-to-day needs. This has direct effects on access to water, food security, livelihoods and health which can subsequently make it more challenging for many countries to achieve the SDGs, and ensure the wellbeing of communities. The increasing difficulty of accessing basic resources for survival, coupled with political instability, and exclusionary governance has been a factor leading to mass displacement of communities as well. Climate change, combined with the ineffective responses from the state, can accelerate an unravelling of underlying social tensions, contributing to weakening the social contract and making fragile contexts even more sensitive<sup>3</sup>.

1 Moving Towards Water Security in the Arab Region, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/59104b5d59cc68eb4e8c9242/t/604f768189175a49bec57a7b/1615820418072/210307+Programme+Analyst+ToR+-+DH+edit.pdf>, ESCWA 2019

2 Climate Change Adaptation in the Arab States Best practices and lessons learned. UNDP: July 2018: <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/climate-and-disaster-resilience-/climate-change-adaptation-in-the-arab-states.html>

3 Climate Change, Conflict and Fragility, ODI, Working Paper, June 2020; The Relationship Between Climate Change and Violent Conflict, SIDA, Working Document, 2018

**A refugee** is someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war or violence. A refugee has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group.

**An internally displaced person** is understood as someone who “have not crossed a border to find safety IDPs stay within their own country and remain under the protection of its government, even if that government is the reason for their displacement.

**(UNHCR)**

While climate change is not the main factor for displacement to occur, the combined effects of underlying inequities, unequal access to basic needs and services, and inability of governments to respond, can lead to disastrous outcomes. Several pieces of research have pointed out that preceding the civil war in Syria which erupted in 2011, the country was affected by a severe drought where during the worst years, 2007 and 2008, average rainfall dropped to 66 percent of the long-term average and certain regions received no rain at all. As a result of the drought, some 800,000 Syrians had lost their livelihoods by 2009 and tens of thousands of rural families had been forced to abandon their homes and head for the city slums due to a lack of other alternatives<sup>4</sup>. Thus, the drought

4 Aron Lund. “Drought, Corruption, and War: Syria’s Agricultural Crisis.” Carnegie Middle East Center: April 2014. <https://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/55376>

fuelled mass internal displacement and social tensions ahead of the broader conflicts that later took place, and continue to today.

Similarly, in Somalia approximately 100,000 people perished and 4 million were displaced by 2011 due to the ongoing conflict; a few years later close to 900,000 people were displaced due to the drought between November 2016 and August 2017. In 2019, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) estimated that the main causes for displacement in Somalia during the first six months of 2019 were primarily insecurity, drought and floods. Currently, a total of 2.6 million people remain displaced within the country<sup>5</sup>. With a lack of other options, violent extremist armed groups such as Al-Shabaab have increasingly attracted young people who, faced with drought-induced food insecurity and limited job prospects<sup>6</sup>, see it as an adequate alternative, thereby further fuelling instability and insecurity.

Likewise, in September 2020, Sudan declared a state of emergency for three-months after floods, which began in mid-July were considered the worst in the last 30 years. Sudanese officials recorded the highest water levels on the Blue Nile since records began over 100 years ago. The floods affected nearly 830,000 people, destroyed thousands of homes, and damaged large tracts of farmland just before harvest, thereby compromising food security especially in Khartoum, where already over 1.4 million people are “[severely food insecure](#)”<sup>7</sup>. Sudan is a particularly interesting example of a context where much of the communal

5 Somalia's 2.6m Internally Displaced Citizens in Need of Water, Shelter and Health. IOM 22 October 2019. <https://www.iom.int/news/somalia-26m-internally-displaced-citizens-need-water-shelter-and-health#:~:text=In%20the%20first%20half%20of,remain%20displaced%20within%20the%20country.>

6 Climate Change Adaptation in the Arab States Best practices and lessons learned. UNDP: July 2018: <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/climate-and-disaster-resilience-/climate-change-adaptation-in-the-arab-states.html>

7 Floods in Sudan Have Shone a Light on its Vulnerability to the Climate Crisis. <https://earth.org/sudan-climate-crisis/>

and intra-tribal conflict has been linked to competition over dwindling natural resources which is hastened by the impacts of climate change, and made worse by inefficient governance, and lack of alternative livelihood options<sup>8</sup>.

In all of these situations, women commonly face higher risks and greater burdens from the impacts of climate change as they find themselves in situations of displacement. Reports show that in climate change-fuelled disasters, women are [80%](#) more likely to be displaced<sup>9</sup> than men, and women and children are [14 times](#)<sup>10</sup> more likely to die than men. This is a consequence of the gender-differentiated roles at the household and community levels whereby when disasters hit, women are often trapped in their homes while the men are outside. Similarly, their caregiving roles, responsibility of children, elderly and the disabled, hamper their mobility during emergencies. Furthermore, conflicts and natural disasters usually result in an increase in human trafficking<sup>11</sup>. The UN Environment Programme (UNEP), has noted as much as a 20-30% increase in trafficking after natural disasters and INTERPOL also warns of women's increased exposure to trafficking following disasters<sup>12</sup>. Many studies indicate that displacement puts women and girls at increased risk of domestic violence, likely due to higher levels of stress and trauma, which is then manifested through violence<sup>13</sup>.

8 Governance and Stabilisation, UNDP Sudan, <https://www.sd.undp.org/content/sudan/en/home/democratic-governance-and-peacebuilding/closed-projects.html>

9 UNDP (2016) Gender and climate change, Overview of linkages between gender and climate change: <https://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/gender/Gender%20and%20Environment/UNDP%20Linkages%20Gender%20and%20CC%20Policy%20Brief%201-WEB.pdf>

10 UN Women: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/women-and-the-sdgs/sdg-13-climate-action>

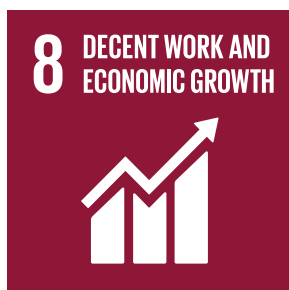
11 Ibid

12 Ibid

13 The Gendered Impact of Climate Displacement. <https://www.climate-refugees.org/perspectives/genderedimpactsofclimatechange>

Discussions about the impact of climate change on the forcibly displaced often focus on those who were forced to move as a result of droughts, cyclones, floods or other climate related conditions. Research and reports often examine how natural disasters create human movement and subsequently create humanitarian crisis. It is worth pointing out however that the above definition of refugee according to the 1951 Refugee Convention does not always cover those affected by climate change. In this overall contexts, there is very limited research undertaken on how climate change affects existing refugees and IDPs, especially vis a vis water security, food security and livelihoods, which as mentioned above are some of the key manifestations of climate change impacts in the region.

### 3.1 Livelihood implications



In the Arab states, labour force participation among women stands at 20.7% relative to 73% among men<sup>1</sup>. Within this context, the most significant source of employment and livelihood of women in the region is in the agricultural

sector, where the female share of the agricultural workforce increased from 30% in 1980 to almost 45% in 2010, exceeding 60% in Jordan, Libya, Syria and

Palestine<sup>2</sup>. As one of the few sectors which is open to refugees, the agricultural sector is a significant provider of job/livelihood opportunities for Syrian refugees, including in Jordan, and Lebanon.

As such, many women who were displaced as a result of war and conflict are engaged in the agriculture sector in Lebanon, Iraq, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen. Most women refugees/IDPs employed in agriculture are in limited time contracts, informal, daily precarious employment, with very little social-security in the event of any crisis. They are also at risk of being the first to be laid off in times of drought, declining harvests or in the midst of a crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>3</sup>. Women, in general, and women (and men) who are also IDPs/refugees do not own agricultural land in the Arab States, and while it remains an important source of income for them, it also makes them particularly vulnerable to losing their livelihood due to external stressors<sup>4</sup>.

As the quality of land and availability and access to water are increasingly affected by climate change, this invariably influences the conditions for agriculture-based livelihood options. As women are more likely to rely on livelihoods derived from natural resources, climate change impacts on these sectors affects them significantly, and given that they usually have fewer assets, or social security – particularly women refugees/IDPs - to fall on back, their adaptive capacity is also reduced.

1 UNDP (2020), Compounding Crises. Will COVID-19 and Lower Oil Prices Lead to a New Development Paradigm in the Arab Region?. Available at: <https://www.arabstates.undp.org/content/rbas/en/home/library/crisis-response0/undp-regional-report--compounding-crises--will-covid-19-and-lowe.html>

2 Four Ways of Strengthening Gender Equality in the Agriculture Sector in the Mena Region. Icarda May 2020. <https://www.icarda.org/media/drywire/four-ways-strengthening-gender-equality-agricultural-sector-mena-region>

3 Impact of COVID-19 on Gender Equality, <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/covid-19-crisis-in-the-mena-region-impact-on-gender-equality-and-policy-responses-ee4cd4f4/>

4 Everlyne Nairesia, Sina Schlimmer, Ombretta Tempra. Improving Access to Land for Women in the Arab World: Policy Options and Tools for Triggering Social and Economic Development. September 11, 2019. <https://egyptssp.ifpri.info/2019/09/11/improving-access-to-land-for-women-in-the-arab-world-policy-options-and-tools-for-triggering-social-and-economic-development/>



The World Food Programme (WFP) estimates that climate variability will be a critical factor that affects the livelihoods of many poor and vulnerable people in the Arab states. "By 2030, the farming activities of food producers, particularly in remote and marginal environments dependent on rain-fed agriculture, will be impacted by climate change and extremes. Measures to help them cope with drought, to increase farming productivity, and to diversify away from farming will be key to improving their resilience and food security<sup>5</sup>."

In Lebanon, many refugee women are engaged in agricultural activities in the Bekaa valley. With water becoming scarcer and lands being affected by the presence of informal settlements and over-use, refugee women's livelihoods could potentially be negatively affected<sup>6</sup>. Likewise in Yemen, reduced access to water and extreme weather events undermine livelihoods, particularly of vulnerable rural based households. Highly vulnerable populations are facing displacement, as a direct result of the conflict, but also due to the lack of employment opportunities, constricting agricultural land and consequent decline in income, affecting their ability to purchase basic food and water supplies. Despite the low income and likely precarious working conditions, the loss of needed livelihoods for women refugees/IDPs engaged in the agriculture sector in different Arab states could have dire impacts. In addition to the direct effects of loss of income which could affect food security, health and overall wellbeing, coping strategies could involve taking children, and particularly girls, out of school to save meagre expenses. In a COVID-19 context, the extended closure of schools inside refugee camps could make it difficult for girls to return to school. Based on UNHCR data, the Malala Fund has estimated that as a result of

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5 Food in an Uncertain Future: The Impacts of Climate Change on Food Security and Nutrition in the Middle East and North Africa. World Food Programme 2015.

6 The Impact of The Syria Crisis on Agriculture, Food Security and Livelihoods in Lebanon. FAO and REACH 2014.



Photo: UNDP Somalia

COVID-19, half of all refugee girls in secondary school will not return when classrooms reopen. In countries where refugee girls' gross secondary enrolment was already less than 10%, all girls are at risk of dropping out for good, which will have myriad of repercussions<sup>7</sup>. In the immediate aftermath, it could mean the loss of a school meal, thereby affecting the nutrition and health of refugee/IDP girls residing in camps. Similarly, there may also be an increase in early marriage in exchange for dowry – all conditions which can often lead to trafficking. This is especially the case of women refugees/IDPs residing outside camps where paying rent to ensure the availability of adequate shelter becomes a more pressing and immediate need. Other impacts also include rising domestic violence due to increased economic stress on the family, risks of sexual exploitation as women may be coerced to provide sexual favours in exchange for food or housing. Finally, loss of women's contribution to the household economy could reduce their sense of autonomy in household decision-making, thus reinforcing disenfranchisement and unequal power dynamics.



Photo: UNDP Iraq

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<sup>7</sup> Coronavirus, a dire threat to refugee education <https://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2020/9/5f508f5b4/coronavirus-dire-threat-refugee-education.html>

## The COVID-19 Implications on Livelihoods

According to UNHCR in Jordan, the impact of COVID-19 on refugee women is profound, with almost all those who were working saying they had seen their income source disrupted. While in Lebanon, more than half of women refugees surveyed in late April 2020 reported having lost livelihoods such as daily labour, with 70 per cent saying they have reduced food consumption due to a lack of funds<sup>1</sup>.

Across the region, refugees – especially refugee women – said they had lost income or were not able to continue to work as a result of the strict social distancing conditions<sup>2</sup>. In Iraq, 70% of those negatively impacted refugees by the COVID-19 crisis cited loss of livelihoods as the main consequence<sup>3</sup>, in Jordan, 35% of Syrian refugees who were employed before COVID-19 have lost their jobs, compared to 17% of Jordanian citizens. In Lebanon, 60% of Syrians have been permanently laid off due to COVID-19, relative to 39% of Lebanese citizens<sup>4</sup>.

Initial studies into the impact of COVID-19 on women refugees/IDPs<sup>5</sup> indicate that women are the first to feel economic losses: All people—women and men, girls and boys—consistently identify income as one of their highest concerns in the current crisis, with women experiencing some of the biggest pressures. Women are most often employed in the informal sector, with few formal protections or paid benefits. They are also most often employed in industries hit hardest by COVID-19 restrictions, such as petty trading and the service industry<sup>6</sup>. In Palestine, 1 in 2 women has lost all income because of COVID-19, compared to 1 in 3 men<sup>7</sup>.

These challenges, compounded by those brought on by climate change places a triple burden on women refugees/IDPs.

1 Refugees across Arab world feel economic pain of coronavirus. <https://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2020/5/5eabcf704/refugees-across-arab-world-feel-economic-pain-coronavirus.html>

2 Covid-19 One more Set Back for Refugees in MENA especially Women and Girls. Care International: 2020. [https://insights.careinternational.org.uk/images/in-practice/RGA-and-measurement/GiE\\_Learning\\_RGA\\_Regional-MENA-Summary\\_COVID-19\\_June2020.pdf](https://insights.careinternational.org.uk/images/in-practice/RGA-and-measurement/GiE_Learning_RGA_Regional-MENA-Summary_COVID-19_June2020.pdf)

3 UNOPS Iraq Information Center Facebook Opinion Poll, April 2020.

4 Locked Down and Left Behind: The Impact of COVID-19 on Refugees' Economic Inclusion. July 2020

5 Gender Matters: COVID-19's outsized impact on displaced women and girls. <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/gender-matters-covid-19-s-outsized-impact-displaced-women-and-girls> and Locked Down and Left Behind: The Impact of COVID-19 on Refugees' Economic Inclusion. <https://www.refugeesinternational.org/reports/2020/7/6/locked-down-and-left-behind-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-refugees-economic-inclusion> and Protecting the rights at work of refugees and other forcibly displaced persons during the COVID-19 pandemic Recommendations for Policy-makers and Constituents. [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_protect/---protrav/---migrant/documents/publication/wcms\\_748485.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---protrav/---migrant/documents/publication/wcms_748485.pdf)

6 COVID-19 and its economic toll on women: The story behind the numbers. UN Women. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/9/feature-covid-19-economic-impacts-on-women>

7 Evolving Trends: Women in COVID-19. CARE International June 2020.



## 3.2 Availability and Access to Water



As the most water scarce region in the world, 38% of the Arab population live in countries with absolute water scarcity, 48% in countries with water scarcity, and up to 86% in countries with absolute scarcity. Access to this precious natural resource is therefore a challenge for

all segments of the population. In addition, many countries which host refugees face severe water scarcity (with absolute water scarcity threshold of 500 m<sup>3</sup> per capita). Jordan, for example, is the second most water-scarce country in the world<sup>1</sup>, and hosts more than 1.4 million refugees<sup>2</sup>. A combination of these two factors have caused tremendous strain on the country's extremely low water resources, making it difficult to supply sufficient water for refugees. Not only does this directly affect their well-being, but it also increases social tensions, potentially leading to the erosion of social cohesion and internal peace<sup>3</sup>. According to UNHCR, the majority of refugee camps in the world are unable to provide the recommended daily water minimum of 20 litres of water per person per day<sup>4</sup>. The significance of this limited access was illustrated in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. As directives to wash hands regularly were made, this simple task became a challenge for refugees/IDPs who often rely on humanitarian organisations for water supplies, which are already very limited.

It is important to note that while the discourse on water scarcity in Jordan and Lebanon considers water governance, poor infrastructure, and increased

demand as some of the underlying causes of water scarcity, it does not necessarily consider climate change as an exacerbator. However, the blame is often primarily placed on refugees/IDPs who are seen to put additional pressure on an already scarce resource. This adds stigma, discrimination and a deepening of social tensions between host communities and refugees or IDPs. This may also impact women more as they are the ones in charge of water collection and usage within the households, in either camp contexts, or within host communities.

Although women in refugee camps in Jordan do not walk for long hours to access water, accessibility is not without its challenges. According to a gender assessment of the WASH sector in Jordan implemented in 2016, refugee men and women in Za'atari and Azraq camps explained that the lack of enough water and sanitation, and hygiene materials affects their relationships with neighbours negatively. Refugee women reported for example, that they travel to another public tank to collect water, whenever their share was finished, as the designated amount would not be sufficient; however this was causing friction with other refugee families, as the latter would see this as being used by others who are not appointed to this tank<sup>5</sup>.

Because water supply in refugee camps is facilitated by humanitarian organisations and initiatives, the impact of climate change on water supply in refugee camps may be less obvious. But in a regional context where there is significant water scarcity, the overall effect on accessible and safe water does become a priority need to address. As adaptation efforts are undertaken to address water scarcity, and as humanitarian organisations identify ways to make water more accessible to refugee populations, it may become

1 Water, Sanitation and Hygiene, Unicef Jordan. <https://www.unicef.org/jordan/water-sanitation-and-hygiene>

2 Jordan Response Plan for the Syria Crisis 2020-2022. <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/77262.pdf>

3 Amir Dakak. Water Crisis in Refugee Camps. EcoMENA July 14, 2020. <https://www.ecomena.org/water-crisis-in-refugee-camps/>

4 UNHCR. "Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)." <https://wash.unhcr.org/what-we-do/>

5 Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF) WASH Sector Gender Analysis in Za'atari and Azraq Refugee Camp <https://reliefweb.int/report/jordan/inter-agency-task-force-iatf-wash-sector-gender-analysis-za-ata-ri-and-azraq-refugee>

necessary to identify integrated solutions, especially in contexts where water scarcity and refugee/IDP populations converge. The participation and leadership of women IDP/refugees in identifying such solutions should be an integral part of such efforts.

### 3.3 Food Security



According to WFP, more than half of all food insecure people around the world are located in fragile contexts, or countries affected by conflict<sup>6</sup>. Availability of food, affordability and access to it and utilization all contribute

to food security, and climate change affects this in multiple ways. For example, decline in agricultural production as a result of land degradation; lack of fresh water; reduced yields, pest damage to crops among others are some of the effects. Climate change affects the quality and safety of food, increases the probability of disease outbreaks (higher rates of microbial growth under higher temperatures), and reduces nutritional quality of crops (associated with increased carbon dioxide concentrations and more variable and warmer climate). It could also lead to reduced livestock productivity due to diseases, decline of water and feed resource base. As a result of decreasing domestic production, there is also a concurrent increased dependency on food imports, leading to vulnerability to food prices spikes and volatility.

All the above factors affect the most vulnerable and marginalised communities who rely on subsistence agriculture in rural areas, including those in refugee camp settings, as well as refugees in urban settings of which women are at the core<sup>7</sup>.

According to Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) figures released in 2017, Syria saw a 67% reduction in its GDP, with food security severely undermined. Nearly 80% of Syrians needed humanitarian assistance, while 50% required food assistance. The figure for those needing humanitarian assistance in Iraq was 30% of the population while in Yemen it reached 70% to 80%. Meanwhile, 9% of Iraqis and 50% of Yemenis required food assistance. In Libya, where the situation has worsened since 2017, 6 % of the population needed food assistance<sup>1</sup>. Of the 690 million people who are food insecure in the world right now, 60% are women and girls<sup>2</sup>. It has also been documented that during times of crisis, families tend to reduce meals as a coping strategy for dealing with reduction in access to food. When taking into account the impact of climate change on natural resource-dependent livelihood options, as well as COVID-19 related restrictions on employment (formal or informal), it is expected that reduced incomes are an important driver of food insecurity<sup>3</sup>. According to a World Bank report published in 2017, many refugee and host populations are food insecure and poor. In Syria, UNICEF screened 2.3 million children and pregnant and lactating women for acute malnutrition. In Jordan, approximately half of the refugee households have reported reducing the quantity and quality of food and skipping meals as a coping mechanism. In Lebanon, only 7% of refugees are living with acceptable levels of food security<sup>4</sup>.

A recent study on the effects of COVID-19 indicate that 37% of surveyed refugee families chose to reduce meals as a coping mechanism to dealing with food shortage in Azraq Camp in Jordan<sup>5</sup>. Although the study does not explicitly consider gender, it can be assumed that the reduction of food is likely to affect women and girls more than men and boys, as it is generally recognised that in countries facing conflict and hunger, women

6 Background Paper: Context Analysis to Inform WFP Strategic Plan (2022-2026). <https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/239e24c739d54a-43b9723e1ec03d7d3e/download/>

7 Please see: Climate change, food security and nutrition in the Arab region: linkages and implications ESCWA regional meeting , Amman, 27-28 Nov 2019 [https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/events/files/3.2\\_a\\_regional\\_perspective\\_on\\_food\\_security\\_and\\_climate\\_change\\_from\\_fao\\_-\\_tamara\\_nanitashvili\\_-\\_fao\\_rne\\_0.pdf](https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/events/files/3.2_a_regional_perspective_on_food_security_and_climate_change_from_fao_-_tamara_nanitashvili_-_fao_rne_0.pdf) and Food in an Uncertain Future: The Impacts of Climate Change on Food Security and Nutrition in the Middle East and North Africa. World Food Programme 2015. [https://www.preventionweb.net/files/46974\\_46974odiwfpimpactofccnfsinmena201.pdf](https://www.preventionweb.net/files/46974_46974odiwfpimpactofccnfsinmena201.pdf)

1 Regional Overview of Food Insecurity Near East and North Africa 2017. <http://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/l8336EN/>

2 Women are Hungry for Change, WFP-USA, <https://www.wfpusa.org/explore/wfps-work/who-wfp-serves/women-hunger/>

3 Food markets during Covid-19, June 29 2020, [www.imf.org](http://www.imf.org)

4 Unleashing Climate-Smart and Water-Saving Agriculture Technologies in MENA. World Bank 2017. <https://elibrary.worldbank.org/doi/pdf/10.1596/29753>

5 Rapid Needs Assessment Impact of COVID-19 on Vulnerable Populations in Jordan Urban Areas and Azraq Camp. <https://reliefweb.int/report/jordan/rapid-needs-assessment-impact-covid-19-vulnerable-populations-jordan-urban-areas-and>



often eat last and least – sacrificing for their families<sup>6</sup>. This would have direct effects on refugee women and girls' health, growth and development. Female-headed households showed disproportionately higher losses in food consumption as they have less access to informal labour opportunities and access to credit than their male counterparts.

According to WFP "Overview of Refugee Food Security in Jordan COVID-19 Update" in September 2020, 63% of refugee households living in camps and communities with monthly food assistance in the form of cash-based transfers in Jordan are food insecure or vulnerable to food insecurity<sup>7</sup>. This poses great health risks especially to women refugees who may resort to negative coping mechanisms in terms of reducing food intake which subsequently affects their health and well-being. Shortage of food also makes refugee women more vulnerable to sexual abuse and exploitation, as they may find themselves exchanging food vouchers for other critical needs. According to the same report, some households are forced to monetise part of their WFP entitlement to meet essential needs other than food and this comes at the expense of household food security. Additionally, for those who live with chronic illnesses, such as HIV/AIDS, diabetes, or other non-communicable diseases, adequate nutrition is vital in maintaining the immune system, and retain their health well-being.

Table 1 in the following page provides an overview of the needs identified by respondents in Jordan to preserve their dignity in light of the added stressors related to COVID-19. The table also provides an overview of the coping mechanisms identified by respondents with a staggering 37% explaining that reducing meals will be one of the coping strategies.

that they would resort to manage the crisis<sup>8</sup>.



Photo: UNDP Iraq

<sup>6</sup> Women are Hungry for Change, WFP-USA, <https://www.wfpusa.org/explore/wfps-work/who-wfp-serves/women-hunger/>

<sup>7</sup> Overview of Refugee Food Security in Jordan COVID-19 Update. WFP September 2020. <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/WFP-0000120505.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Rapid Needs Assessment Impact of COVID-19 on Vulnerable Populations in Jordan Urban Areas and Azraq Camp

## Needs identified by respondents to preserve dignity and cope with shortage of income

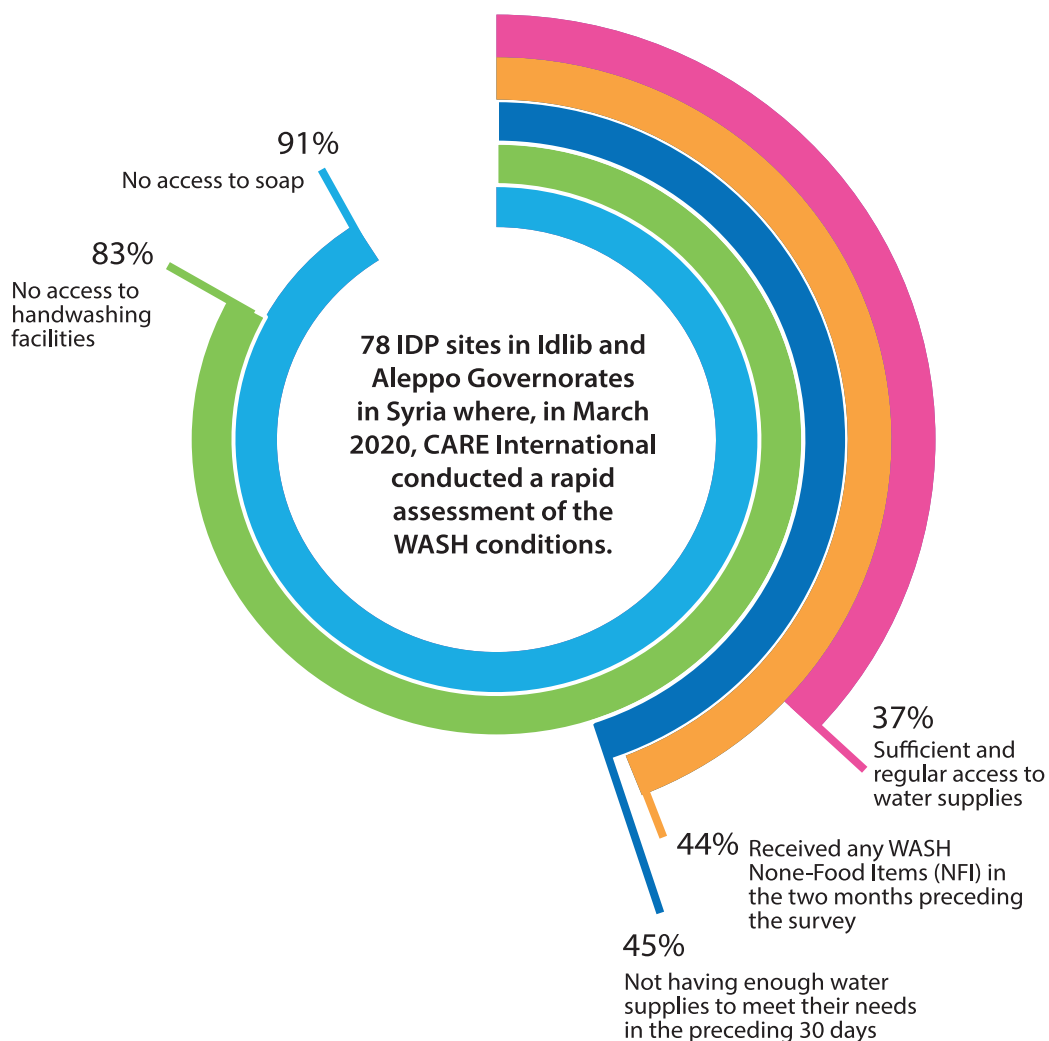
**Table 1** Needs identified by respondents (male and female) to preserve dignity and cope with shortage of income in refugee camps in Jordan<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Table based on data from Rapid Needs Assessment Impact of COVID-19 on Vulnerable Populations in Jordan Urban Areas and Azraq Camp

Need Identified	% of Respondents	Coping Strategies	% of Respondents
None-food items (NFIs), cash and livelihoods	25	Reducing meals	37
Security and protection	21	Selling electric shopping cards	28
Hygiene, sanitation and water	11	Borrowing	24
Food	10	Selling tools from home	7
Health supplies	6	Innovating in products/ marketing (using online marketing instead of physical marketing)	5

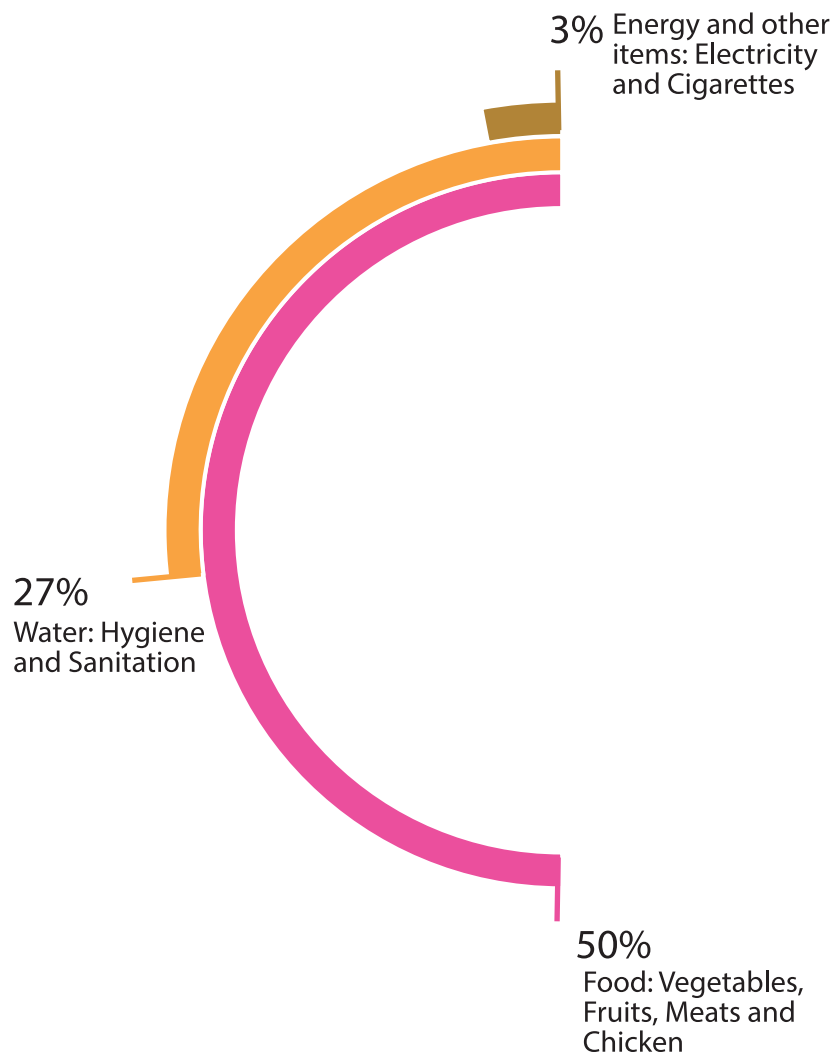
# The COVID-19 Implications on Water and Food Security

Access to water and sanitation in the region is affected by climate change variables and is not optimal. The conditions have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 situation. In March 2020, CARE international conducted a rapid assessment of the WASH conditions in 78 IDP sites in Idlib and Aleppo Governorates in Syria. The Assessment found severe shortage in accessibility to water. The main reasons respondents reported not having enough water are due to being unable to afford to purchase water and water trucking vendors being unavailable<sup>1</sup>.



<sup>1</sup> Rapid WASH Assessment Key Findings. CARE International April 2020 - [https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/assessments/care\\_nws\\_rapid\\_wash\\_assessment\\_march\\_2020.pdf](https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/assessments/care_nws_rapid_wash_assessment_march_2020.pdf)

In Jordan a rapid assessment<sup>1</sup> conducted in Azraq camp illustrated that due to the movement restrictions and curfews imposed to curtail the spread of COVID-19, Syrian refugees were not allowed to leave the camp for any reason. Concurrently, with the supply of essential goods and services being reduced, beneficiaries reported a shortage of:



<sup>1</sup> Rapid Needs Assessment Impact of COVID-19 on Vulnerable Populations in Jordan Urban Areas and Azraq Camp  
<https://reliefweb.int/report/jordan/rapid-needs-assessment-impact-covid-19-vulnerable-populations-jordan-urban-areas-and>

## 4. Multiple vulnerabilities, multiple opportunities

Women refugees/IDPs carry the burden of the different crises that they find themselves in. In addition to being forced to flee their homes, manage reduced livelihoods and quality of life as a result of forced displacement, made worse by climate change impacts, they are also impacted by a global pandemic affecting their health, security and futures. It is difficult to identify which of these stressors has the greatest impact on them but what is evident is that climate stressors and the COVID-19 pandemic both exacerbated the existing precarious situation that women refugees and IDPs find themselves in.

Deep rooted gender inequalities are not the by-product of forced displacement or climate change. Rather various stressors can potentially feed on these existing inequalities and increase the vulnerabilities of women and girls by limiting their access to social and natural resources and thus their resilience and adaptive ability. Furthermore, persistent patriarchal and unequal power dynamics are often entrenched at various levels leading to sub-optimum solutions that either maintain or worsen the gender equality situation. However, there are cases where these stressors have led to changes in social structures and gender dynamics such as increased women's engagement in male-dominated activities due to changing gender roles as a consequence of the crises, or where women have used their agency and local knowledge in devising adaptation solutions. A recent report highlights this by stating that capitalising on women's networks can open up alternative communication channels, and results in opportunities for broader dialogue, which can in turn underscore women's capacities as decision-makers, influencers, and increase their access to political and peacebuilding processes<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Gender, Climate and Security: Sustaining Inclusive Peace on the Frontlines of Climate Change, <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/gender-climate-and-security-en.pdf?la=en&vs=215>, UNEP, UNDP, DPPA, UN Women, 2020

In response to the above, it is apparent that climate change solutions and the “wake-up” call of the COVID-19 pandemic can provide opportunities to address the specific combined impacts of the triple crises that refugees/IDP women in the region face. Some specific areas of further engagement or entry points include:

### 1. Gendered climate action as the entry point to strengthen the humanitarian-development-peace nexus and an opportunity to advance gender justice

SDG 13 on climate action outlines several targets that address climate crisis, which could help place climate action at the heart of the humanitarian-development-peace nexus by focusing on gendered integrated solutions. Efforts could be made by organisations that have both a humanitarian and a development mandate to support women refugees/IDPs by developing climate-oriented sustainable solutions that address both climate change challenges, but also their immediate needs and priorities.

Refugee/IDP women in the region have limited access to natural resources (food, water, land), socioeconomic resources (livelihoods, social capital) and services (energy, infrastructure and sanitation). By **integrating climate solutions more systematically in the humanitarian response, climate action provides an opportunity to enhance such resources through adaptation solutions that improve women refugees/IDPs's technical and management skills and their access to and control of natural and productive resources**. For instance, where arable land is available, it can enhance resource efficiency through smart green solutions in subsistence or productive agriculture and water management solutions. Likewise, renewable energy solutions can improve energy access generally in addition to providing access to appliances and technologies that reduce the burden of care (and



the health risks associated with traditional methods). Green economic solutions can also target women refugees/IDPs, thereby supporting their income generating capacity in a sustainable manner.

## 2. Women as decision-makers and agents of change

As research within the women, peace and security agenda has shown, collaboration among diverse groups of women contributes not only to better content of peace agreements but to higher implementation rates of agreement provisions<sup>2</sup>. This would be equally applicable in the context of climate action in displaced communities. Facilitating collective approaches by targeting women refugee/IDPs, but also host communities may help to enhance social relations between the two communities. This can contribute to minimizing social tensions and reducing local triggers for conflict. As such there is an opportunity to include women refugees/ IDPs, as well as women in host communities as decision-makers in climate-related solutions within humanitarian responses. **The engagement of women enables a response that meets their communities' needs as defined by women and builds on their experience as the main managers of food, health and hygiene, water and energy at the household level thus improving their livelihoods and the lives of their communities while responding to climate issues.** Furthermore, engagement of women in climate solutions including in natural resource management enhances their role in social cohesion and in preventing resource-related conflict<sup>3</sup> within those displaced and with the host communities. This in turn challenges gender norms about women's role and

2 Krause, Jana, Krause Werner, and Branfors Piia, "Women's Participation in Peace Negotiations and the Durability of Peace," *International Interactions*, 44:6 (2018): 985–1016, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03050629.2018.1492386>

3 J.G. Fernandez, J. M. Smith, L. Olosky, "the Climate, Gender, Conflict Nexus: Amplifying women's contributions at the grassroots", Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security (2021)

empowers them to contribute to peacebuilding more generally.

## 3. Improve coordination among relevant agencies and devise joint financing structures

Climate action requires long term solutions, relies on innovative technologies, as well as partnerships and skills that may not be readily available within humanitarian emergency operations. In May 2020, the Humanitarian Policy Group explained that humanitarian response often fails to consider the long term impact of protracted crisis on refugees and IDPs and believed that humanitarian actors may be "ill-equipped to work on longer-term structural issues which by turn leads to gaps in addressing issues like gender-based violence, economic justice, voice and autonomy, and sexual and reproductive health."<sup>4</sup> Likewise, climate change requires a longer-term perspective, even though its impacts are now increasingly regular and immediate.

Increasing and improving coordination amongst relevant agencies to build human and institutional capacity on the integration of gendered climate considerations into humanitarian action will be necessary to bridge this gap. Climate change could be the entry point to bridge this divide and increase collaboration with OCHA, UNHCR and others<sup>5</sup>. Developing, testing and applying working approaches and methodologies of coordination and collaboration to integrate a climate action component

4 Megan Daigle, Barnaby Willitts-King and Nicholas Crawford. Moving forward on gender, livelihoods and financing Submission to UN High-Level Panel on internal displacement. May 2020. [https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resource-documents/idps\\_hlp\\_policy\\_brief\\_web.pdf](https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resource-documents/idps_hlp_policy_brief_web.pdf)

5 A good example is the climate adaptation in humanitarian settings project in African including Sudan, Chad and Burundi is a good example to learn from: [https://www.international-climate-initiative.com/en/details/project/adaptation-to-climate-change-in-subsaharan-african-humanitarian-situations-18\\_II\\_169-3022](https://www.international-climate-initiative.com/en/details/project/adaptation-to-climate-change-in-subsaharan-african-humanitarian-situations-18_II_169-3022)

in humanitarian sub-clusters, and piloting integrated approaches within the context of programmes that support women refugees/IDPs can help to provide a proof of concept to upscale such efforts.

Lastly, the funding modality of humanitarian action is different from that for climate action. This makes the two realms even further apart. Fragmented resource mobilization, one-year humanitarian implementation cycle and focus of donors on emergency and crises response may make it difficult to integrate climate action in humanitarian response. A recent OECD reports indicated that explicit financing for women's empowerment remains particularly low in sectors related to natural resources, including agriculture and rural development, energy access, and water and sanitation<sup>6</sup>. Likewise, opportunities for strengthening women's roles in peacebuilding through natural resources related intervention are still under-explored<sup>7</sup>. Within this category, it may be assumed that there is even less dedicated funding that target women refugees/IDPs specifically. Finally, another dimension is that climate change related financing and funds are led either by dedicated climate-funds, or more development-oriented organisations. The Humanitarian Policy Group Brief which focuses specifically on internal displacement recognizes that funding modalities are at times a hinderance in collective action and delivering cohesively. Future integration of climate considerations within humanitarian operations therefore will also need to address and change the funding models that are currently in place, and which do not favour integrated responses.

6 OECD-DAC Network on Gender Equality. (2019). Development Finance for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: A Snapshot. <http://www.oecd.org/development/gender-development/Dev-finance-for-gender-equality-and-womens-economic-empowerment-2019.pdf>

7 Gender, Climate and Security: Sustaining Inclusive Peace on the Frontlines of Climate Change, <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headers/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/gender-climate-and-security-en.pdf?la=en&vs=215>, UNEP, UNDP, DPPA, UN Women, 2020

#### **4. Engaging in further research and elaboration on the effects of climate change on refugees/IDPs**

While there is a growing amount of work to understand the extent to which climate change causes, or is a factor for displacement, this working paper has shown that much less information is available when it comes to understanding, and addressing the climate change impacts on those who already identify themselves as IDPs/refugees. Women refugees/IDPs are particularly negatively affected by forced displacement and climate change further degrades their resilience and ability to cope. Therefore more research is needed to better understand these impacts with a gender-perspective. On the other hand, there are cases where women's agency has contributed to adaptation efforts and impacted gender dynamics which are also worth mapping and documenting to distill lessons. A framework could thus be developed for better understanding of both the impact and the opportunities for the integration of climate change considerations in humanitarian response operations in a manner that challenges gender and other equalities.

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