

HUNGER IS A FEMINIST ISSUE

THE ISSUE

FIGHTING AGAINST HUNGER: A HUMANITARIAN LENS



Amina Yusuf (left), a 90-year-old who has lived through 12 different droughts, from Xidhintia (Somaliland). © Daniel Jukes for ActionAid

The world is confronting an unprecedented global hunger crisis. As of September 2022, the population facing the three highest phases of acute food insecurity and requiring urgent humanitarian assistance is greater than at any point since 2017, standing at more than 205 million people.³ The compounded impacts of the climate crisis and COVID-19 are being further exacerbated by rising food, energy and fertiliser prices provoked by the war in Ukraine, deepening the lack of access to livelihoods and poverty.

That hunger has a differentiated and disproportionate impact on women and girls in humanitarian crises is a well-documented phenomenon. Women and girls account for 70% of all people currently in urgent need of food assistance.⁴ When food is scarce, women and girls eat least and last, despite the fact that 90% of the time they are responsible for preparing and purchasing food for their families.⁵

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Hunger also exacerbates existing protection threats and vulnerabilities, creates new ones, and deepens inequalities. Girls are more likely than boys to be taken out of school when families resort to negative coping strategies to feed their families, and girls are at heightened risk of early marriage, transactional sex, and violence. In the East African countries affected by food and climate crises, risks of gender-based violence—

3. GRFC 2022 MYU Final.pdf (foodsecurityportal.org)

4. Real Choices, Real Lives: World Hunger and Its Impact on Girls - World I ReliefWeb

5. Who Does Hunger Affect? - Donate to Save Lives Today | Action Against Hunger

“Women-led and women’s rights organisations understand best the specific needs of women and girls. Local, women-led responses are rooted in their communities, along with the local understanding, networks and connections to respond rapidly to crisis.”



Aisha Berkhad, 60-year-old migrant pastoralist living outside Ceel-Giniseed (Somaliland). © Daniel Jukes for ActionAid

including sexual violence, sexual exploitation, intimate partner violence and female genital mutilation—are increasing, while services to respond remain limited.⁶

At the same time, across the spectrum, women are instrumental in addressing hunger⁷: in food availability (production), food access (distribution) and food utilisation, the three main components of food security.⁸ They are also key in activities that support agricultural development, with women producing 70% of Africa’s food. But here too, gender inequality limits their access to land, inputs, and credit vis a vis their male counterparts.

Such tendencies lay bare the fact that when talking about the global hunger crisis, we must necessarily talk not only about the specific vulnerability and susceptibility of women and girls to hunger, but the critical role that women play in the response and the need for transformative humanitarian action that goes far beyond the vision of women as vulnerable, as victims, instead supporting concrete actions to address women’s inequality at all levels.

This must happen in terms of what is done to address hunger: scaling up rapid funding to address the food crisis, ensuring that it reaches women and girls, and promoting an integrated response to hunger that takes into account the multifaceted impact that hunger has on women and girls.

But it must also consider the “how”. At ActionAid, we have witnessed again the value of women’s leadership in crisis. Women-led and women’s rights organisations understand best the specific needs of women and girls. Local, women-led responses are rooted in their communities, along with the local understanding, networks and connections to respond rapidly to crisis. Women-led responses have also been invaluable in challenging entrenched inequality and harmful stereotypes.

Yet we have also witnessed how local women’s leadership continues to be undervalued and overlooked in different humanitarian crises. Despite women and their organisations being at the frontlines of humanitarian responses, women and girls are often excluded from the decision-making processes that impact their lives. Local and national women-led organisations are barely registered on the humanitarian funding scale - the estimated level of total humanitarian funding that they receive stands at a tiny 1%.

In addressing hunger, there is a critical need to recognise and prioritise the needs of women and girls, and the leadership role that women play as a means to truly shift power, resources and influence to local, women-led responses. This means working with women’s organisations and platforms, such as the Feminist Humanitarian Network, of which ActionAid is a co-creator and board member. This network brings together a collective of women leaders, including women’s rights organisations in the Global South, and is committed to a transformed humanitarian system that promotes a feminist humanitarian agenda.

We believe that hunger is a feminist issue, and that any effective response must necessarily be feminist.

Alianza por la Solidaridad-ActionAid Spain

6. OCHA, August 2022.

7. Invisibile Women and Girls Hunger Report (care-international.org)

8. <https://plan-international.org/eu/blog/2022/10/28/the-hunger-crisis-isnt-gender-neutral-our-response-shouldnt-be-either/>