

# DEMYSTIFYING GENDER

A photograph of a woman in a patterned blue and yellow dress carrying a baby on her back. The baby is wrapped in an orange cloth. The woman is holding a yellow plastic container. The background is a dusty outdoor area with other people in the distance.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE  
IMPLEMENTATION OF MINIMUM  
COMMITMENTS FOR GENDER  
PROGRAMMING IN EMERGENCY  
WASH RESPONSE.

A CASE STUDY FROM  
THE DRC.



# BIO OF DELPHINE BRUN



Delphine Brun has worked as an inter-agency Gender Advisor with the IASC GenCap project since 2009. She was deployed to the Democratic Republic of Congo between September 2009 and February 2011. Since May 2011, Delphine has worked as GenCap Advisor with the global clusters in Geneva. One of her particular areas of interest is finding creative solutions in order to make the importance and application of gender sensitive programming as practical as possible. With post graduate diplomas in philosophy and gender issues, Delphine has been working on gender for the past 13 years, including 7 years in development and humanitarian settings, working for INGOs and UNICEF. Her support has involved all sectors but specifically WASH, Food Security and Child Protection.

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# BACKGROUND



Established in 2007, GenCap is a standby roster of gender experts managed by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Sub-Working Group on Gender in Humanitarian Action and the Norwegian Refugee Council.

GenCap Advisors are deployed to humanitarian situations for six to twelve months to provide support to information collection and analysis, programme planning, capacity building, coordination and advocacy on gender equality programming. The IASC Gender Handbook: Women, Girls, Boys and Men – Different Needs, Equal Opportunities and the IASC GBV Guidelines are tools used to guide and inform their work.

All information within this paper reflects and documents the experiences and the lessons learned from the GenCap Advisor, Delphine Brun's, deployment to the Democratic Republic of Congo, from September 2009 – March 2010.<sup>1</sup> Dialogue with and support to the WASH cluster was first initiated in the framework of the global UNICEF lead initiative on gender in humanitarian action, for which Delphine Brun was the programme manager in the DRC from July 2008 to July 2009.<sup>2</sup> The experiences reflected in this paper are based on Delphine Brun's work as the UNICEF Gender in Humanitarian Action Program Manager and as GenCap Advisor.

The aim of the project was to gather the necessary evidence-base to demonstrate how the better inclusion of gender

analysis leads to more effective and efficient programme design. In order for WASH actors to reach their humanitarian objective, it is imperative to analyse and take into account the distinct needs of the two halves of the population. For example, if poor quality latrine stalls meant that women did not use them, it would be very difficult to reach the objective of improved sanitation. The overall strategy aimed to show that effective gender sensitive programming leads to better results and outcomes for girls, boys, men and women, and also that such approaches are not only feasible but necessary. Consultation of displaced girls and women in eastern DRC and empirical observation provided the evidence that WASH interventions did not sufficiently address the needs for the security and dignity of the affected population. This was the starting point of a dialogue and collaboration with the WASH cluster that resulted in 2009 in the design and adoption of non-negotiable minimum commitments for the security and dignity of girls, boys, women and men in water, hygiene and sanitation.

It is highly worthy of note that this work would not have been possible if the head of the WASH section in UNICEF and if the national cluster lead were not receptive to the challenges identified by Delphine Brun. It was agreed that participation was key, that quality should not be ignored in emergency response and that the support on gender had to be practical, in order to be efficient.

1. As GenCap advisor, Delphine's role focused on: 1) Provision of programme support to the cluster in reinforcing the capacity of cluster members responsible for project implementation in the field in conducting gender sensitive programming in accordance with the commitments. 2) Provision of technical support to the cluster lead in order to reinforce accountability mechanisms for application of the commitments at the project implementation level in the field.

2. As GenCap advisor, other areas of support involved the testing and introduction of the gender markers in the Pooled Fund Unit mechanism, the introduction of cluster specific gender strategies in the Humanitarian Action Plan 2010 as well as programming support to the food security cluster. Thanks to the positive experience of the WASH cluster in developing and following its minimum commitments for the security and dignity of women, men, girls and boys in water, hygiene and sanitation, all the other clusters requested support in order to develop minimum commitments for their own sector. As UNICEF's programme manager, additional areas of support also included emergency child protection and Non-food Items assistance.



# INTRODUCTION

*'Although situations will differ depending on context it is crucial for the success of emergency and relief programmes that gender issues be raised, monitored and included at all stages in the response.'*<sup>3</sup>

Awareness about the need for gender sensitivity in humanitarian response has been growing over the last two decades. There is increasing recognition that *'not taking gender and gendered vulnerabilities into account can lead to a greater disaster impact'*.<sup>4</sup> However, in spite of the gains made in this regard, the implementation of gender-sensitive approaches during emergencies remains limited.

This paper documents the experience of designing and implementing a clear framework for establishing a gender sensitive methodology based on five minimum gender commitments. These commitments demonstrate an approach to effectively integrating gender programming

into emergency response. Although the paper focuses exclusively on the WASH sector, its broader aim is to provide an example of a successful framework that could be adopted in a variety of contexts to encourage a more mainstreamed gender sensitive approach to emergency response.

**This paper will explore four specific elements of this approach:**

- ▶ The minimum commitments that were established
- ▶ The need and rationale for these minimum commitments to be established
- ▶ The processes involved in their formulation and implementation
- ▶ The lessons learned from this experience.

The lessons learned from this methodology aim to heighten understanding of gender programming and demonstrate how it can become a more standardised and consistent dimension of all emergency responses.



# WHAT ARE THE MINIMUM GENDER COMMITMENTS?

The minimum commitments were the product of a dynamic dialogue with UNICEF's WASH section and cluster members. This dialogue centred around questions such as: What do we do well and not so well? What top priority actions should we take? And is gender our business? These discussions took place at a national and provincial level, and were the first time cluster members were asked to reflect, debate and engage on this matter, to articulate that this was a top priority to be taken into account in all interventions. This highly productive discourse resulted in the formulation of five minimum commitments with the aim of being systematically applied into the field response.

## The five minimum commitments that were ultimately adopted were:

- I. Analyse and take into consideration **gendered division of tasks within households and communities** and the different needs of women, men, girls and boys in water provision, sanitation and hygiene.
- II. **Consult girls and women in priority** at all stages of the project, particularly about the physical placement and the design of water points, showers and toilets, in order to reduce time spent waiting and collecting water as well as to mitigate incidences of violence. Ensure that evaluation and translation teams include female staff.
- III. Encourage an **equal representation** of women and men in the committees and in trainings so that all users have an equal mastery of facilities. Involve men in **hygiene maintenance** and in hygiene programmes.
- IV. **Separate by sex** the blocks of public emergency latrines and showers by using a pictogram, respecting a ratio of 6 latrine and shower stalls for women to 4 for men. Ensure that doors can be **locked** from the inside.
- V. Respond to the specific **hygiene needs** of menstruating girls and women by the construction of special washing facilities and by the provision of female hygiene kits.

These five minimum commitments were designed to be both simple and generic, thus ensuring their relevance and applicability in a variety of context specific situations. Tailoring the support provided on gender programming to the reality of gender issues in the country, and to the perceived priorities of the sector, is key in terms of:

- 1) **Accuracy** of the focus where efforts target the main inequalities in a given context/sector;
- 2) **Ownership** primarily in terms of the fact that it was the cluster itself that determined where the problems lay, and what to be prioritized. Secondly, ownership in terms of the fact that no additional tasks were requested from cluster members as a result of the practical approach used and;
- 3) Positively impacting on the **sustainability** of the support provided.

3. Byrne, B. and Baden, S. Gender, Emergencies and Humanitarian Assistance, *BRIDGE* (33) p. 70 (1995) <http://www.bridge.ids.ac.uk/reports/re33c.pdf>

4. Van Dijkhorst, H., Vonhof, S., Gender And Humanitarian Aid: A Literature Review Of Policy And Practice, Wageningen University p.17 (2005) <http://www.caritas-europa.org/module/FileLib/genderandhumanitarianaidfinalreport.pdf>



# WHY IMPLEMENT MINIMUM GENDER COMMITMENTS?

Based on UNICEF/GenCap's experiences in the DRC, a gender sensitive approach to emergency response was, at times, neglected, resulting in "gender blind" programming.

In 2009, the GenCap Advisor conducted a study in North Kivu which highlighted the fact that, in several IDP sites, toilet facilities were not segregated by sex, let alone constructed in a way to ensure privacy and minimize potential protection risks; no lighting, no secure doors, and no pictures or signs to distinguish the latrine stalls designated for women and for men in a way that could be understood by illiterate people. In addition, the report explored the lack of female hygiene material and its direct impact on displaced girl's and women's mobility and access to education services, social events

and markets. The analysis concluded that gendered aspects of conflict and displacement and the level of community participation in programmes was low, leading to the failure of the response to address the specific needs of displaced girls and women who had fled their homes with few belongings. The construction of separated washing facilities that would allow the female population living in overcrowded environments to wash their hygienic pads, or provision of female hygiene kits seldom existed. These examples are some of many demonstrating that the basic fundamentals of gender consideration in programming were not consistently applied.

As part of its analysis, the GenCap advisor also explored the key barriers preventing the implementation of more gender sensitive programming.



## Two key barriers were identified:

### 1. Lack of understanding on how to implement gender sensitive programming:

Part of the reason for the lack of more developed, gender-sensitive WASH interventions stems from the fact that UNICEF, both as cluster lead and as funding organization, was not sufficiently clear on what was **expected** in terms of gender mainstreaming and GBV prevention. Indeed, technical staff are often overwhelmed by addressing the idea of gender, wrongly believing that gender mainstreaming requires a specific set of knowledge and skills only possessed by gender specialists. Several cluster members expressed interest in mainstreaming gender more consistently into their sector's humanitarian policies, plans and programmes. Yet they often lacked the ability to translate their commitment into concrete programmatic steps.

### 2. Resistance to, and misconception of, gender programming:

In addition, the analysis also found a prevailing view amongst stakeholders that gender sensitive programming is a 'luxury' reserved for recovery and development interventions. Resistance to the adoption of a gender sensitive approach during emergencies is linked to this perception amongst practitioners that incorporating gender and operating in a participatory manner requires additional time, in a context generally defined by the need for timely responses. Emergency responses often emphasize their life saving dimension, and it is often considered that there is not sufficient capacity to adopt a gender sensitive approach in such interventions.

## COMMON PERCEPTIONS AS EXPRESSED BY HUMANITARIAN ACTORS:



These findings highlight the need to incorporate and systematise gender sensitive approaches, with the objective of making gender programming the norm in emergency response. A simple, understandable and practical framework of minimum gender commitments that could be systematically applied to emergency response was therefore needed.

Support and training is needed to successfully implement gender sensitive programming, but this does not mean that progress cannot be achieved on a large scale in a short space of time. In the DRC, efforts to demystify gender programming focused on seeing smaller steps being taken by a wide range

of actors, rather than more elaborate changes being pushed by a smaller number of stakeholders. The challenge was how best to promote gender commitments that would be accessible to field practitioners with no previous experience on gender programming or other related fields. This influenced the decision to develop commitments phrased in a way that could clearly be understood by all, both in terms of value added to current programming and in terms of the concrete actions which needed to be taken to meet these commitments. They also had to be measurable for the follow up and evaluation of their application. Furthermore, the apparent simplicity of the commitments was designed to reassure actors that they were capable of mainstreaming gender in their daily work.



# HOW WERE THEY IMPLEMENTED?

## Formalisation of Commitments

In the summer of 2009, the commitments became a contractual part of the Partner Contract Agreement that UNICEF's WASH partners signed. By the autumn of 2009, the Pooled Fund Unit<sup>5</sup> agreed to include the commitments as part of its project review process. The cluster lead informed all project designers that all projects submitted had to demonstrate their compliance with the minimum commitments. In order to support them in doing so, examples of activities, expected results, indicators and means of verification for each commitment were provided. Accountability was also reinforced through effective implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the commitments, coordinated by the cluster leads at provincial and sub provincial levels. All cluster meetings were encouraged to include at least one point on the implementation of the commitments in their agenda. To date, the approach taken has proven sustainable and is now used as a way of integrating other cross-cutting issues.

## Capacity building of cluster members

In order to familiarize WASH members with the commitments and to ensure their effective and systematic implementation, the GenCap Advisor co-facilitated (with the cluster leads and co leads<sup>6</sup>) several trainings in eastern DRC. Capacity building

was first provided to the organisations involved in the Rapid Response Mechanism.<sup>7</sup> For the RRM team, a "*Learning by Doing*" style of initiative was undertaken. Members were sensitized to the commitments but also asked, during the first session, to define time bound actions they would take in relation to the commitments. They decided what they wanted to do, for example, that they would hire women for the construction of latrine blocks. The training gave more substance to the minimum commitments, allowing participants to test new approaches for themselves with a deadline to report back to the group. The following training sessions allowed an exchange of experiences on the challenges and opportunities that were come across. Many tips were found and shared with the group. The fact that participants had to report back encouraged them in testing these new approaches and eventually influenced their understanding and commitment on gender.

Furthermore, three provincial training sessions were organized from March to June 2009, reaching staff in North Kivu, South Kivu and Ituri, which were more focussed on a sensitization to the commitments and guidance on how to follow them. Additional sessions of one day each were also organized in the Kivus and in Haut Uele in December 2009 and June 2010 for the cluster members, mainly gathering field practitioners.



5. The PFU mechanism is the largest humanitarian fund in DRC. Its aim is to answer to the most persistent and important humanitarian needs of the population.

6. Cluster leads were requested to co-facilitate the sessions in order to reinforce their understanding and ownership of the initiative. Trainings are a kick off exercise that can only bring change if accompanied by the continuous follow up of cluster leads, co leads and organizations.



**Key methodological approaches were identified by the co-facilitators, by the trainees and by the GenCap advisor as particularly successful:**

**Recognize male practitioners as legitimate actors on gender equality programming:** If the gender discourse is inclusive of all, in reality men are often left out of the debates and of the efforts in favour of gender equality. That is probably why gender equality is often wrongly reduced to a women's issue. Discussing with male practitioners about a subject they are often excluded from, and stressing the importance of their role and involvement, motivates them in addressing the issue.<sup>8</sup> The realization that gender programming takes into account the capacities, needs and priorities of both men and women helps demonstrate that gender is not a one-sided issue.

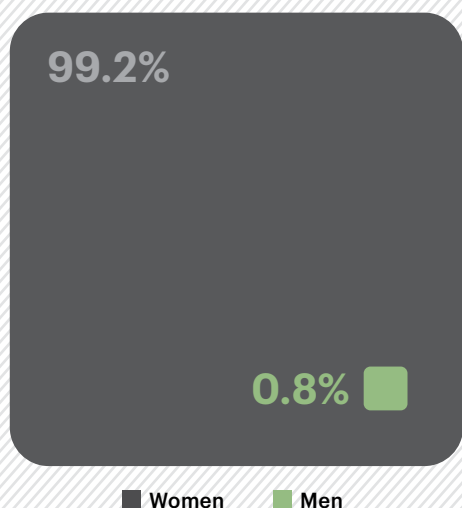
**Use participant's field experience as an entry point:** Drawing evidence on the importance of gender mainstreaming based on the participants' own professional

experience has proven particularly effective. For example, the 24 hour clock, where trainees describe what displaced women and men of the communities do each hour of every day, brings awareness on gendered task division and on women's core role in the family and the community.<sup>9</sup>

**Favour entertaining and participatory approaches:** Participants might expect that the matter will be treated in a serious or even righteous manner. The use of interactive games, such as gender quizzes or stories, helps catch and maintain the interest of the trainees. Participatory approaches help them experience for themselves what the weight of social expectations and unequal access to services imply.

**Use a simple terminology that will not overwhelm or alienate practitioners:** Talking of girls, boys, women and men and of their respective needs and priorities in humanitarian settings allows understanding and interest. Technical jargon should be avoided during sessions.

## LINK GLOBAL AND NATIONAL GENDER DISCRIMINATIONS TO PRACTICAL FIELD IMPLICATIONS:



### IN 2007, 99.2% OF THE SEXUAL VIOLENCE SURVIVORS REPORTED IN DRC WERE FEMALES

Sexual violence can occur while women are engaged in WASH-related activities. That is why women and girls must be consulted in priority when it comes to deciding on the location and type of facilities.



### 1 OUT OF 2 WOMEN AND 1 OUT OF 5 MEN

are illiterate in DRC. That is why visuals should be used to designate the latrine and shower blocks by sex.

#### 6 LATRINE / SHOWER STALLS FOR FEMALES



#### 4 LATRINE / SHOWER STALLS FOR MALES



The vast majority of the displaced population worldwide is composed of women and children. Women usually use their own latrine stalls when accompanying young children to the toilets. That is why a ratio of **6 latrine/shower stalls for females to 4 stalls for males** must be applied when constructing community facilities.

7. Managed by OCHA and UNICEF, and implemented by two international NGO partners, Solidarites and IRC, the Humanitarian Coordinator's Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM) remains the flagship programme for rapid evaluation and humanitarian assistance in three core areas: Non-Food Item/Emergency Shelter, Education, and WASH. In 2009, it assisted over 675,000 persons with emergency water, sanitation and hygiene. Early in 2009, gender equality and protection became a specific objective of the RRM programme.

8. Out of the 50 cluster members trained in Goma and Bukavu in December 2009, 49 were men.

9. Participants were really surprised to see how much women do for the family and community. It forced their respect and helped them understand that women are time poor. They understood that female participation needs to be sought in areas likely to empower her.

► *How were they implemented? continued*

When you look at the statistics, the need to link global and national gender discriminations to practical field implications becomes starkly clear. Contexts will vary dramatically and as a result so will the practical field implications, a factor that must not be overlooked.

**Benefits for women mean benefits for all:** When technically possible, by associating women in the choice of where water points are located, humanitarian workers can help reduce the time needed to fetch water. Time saved can be used for income generating activities which will benefit the entire family. Examples such as this highlight the broader benefits of gender-sensitive programming.

**Relate the provision of water, sanitation, and hygiene services to people's ability to enjoy other rights:** Girls are more heavily involved than boys in water management. Water points that are far from the habitations can affect girls' ability to have equal access to education.

**Provide local and concrete evidence of the negative impacts of gender blind programming:** It is important to establish how gender blind programming not only jeopardizes the effectiveness but also the efficiency of the assistance provided. In DRC, trainings focused on the fact that the objective of reducing water borne diseases can only be fully reached from inclusive, gender sensitive processes.

► In Kibumba IDP site (North Kivu), for several months there was stagnant water collecting around the water points. While women and children were in charge of water collection, the water committee was heavily dominated by men who were less aware of this problem. As such, the committee had not identified dealing with the stagnant water as a priority until a cholera epidemic was declared.

Another example focused on the fact that the provision of sanitation facilities does not in itself guarantee a positive impact on safety and dignity.

► In an IDP site of North Kivu, latrines were built without prior consultation of girls and women. The female population was uncomfortable using the facilities since they were built near a place where men would socialize. As a result, women relieved themselves in the forest, with negative implications for their safety, their dignity as well as for the public health of the entire community.

**Demonstrate that using gender sensitive approaches allow practitioners to save time, energy and feel proud about their work:** The importance of demonstrating that there are direct benefits to gender sensitive programming is necessary because not all actors have sufficient sensitivity or exposure to the concept of rights-based programming. What do staff gain from using participatory and gender-sensitive approaches? Providing positive and negative examples of the interconnections between gender mainstreaming, interventions' effectiveness and sustainability and team's workload helps demonstrate that qualitative approaches pay off. In DRC, clear examples were used, including;

► In Ituri, Solidarites observed that improved consultation of both women and men about the location of facilities reinforced positive relationships with the communities. Facilities, recognized by the users as their own, were better taken care of. Women felt dignified and more secured using them. Furthermore, as a result of this sense of ownership, the team spent less time promoting hygiene.



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► In South Kivu, IRC decided to offer equal opportunities of employment to women and men in building facilities. Before, only men were given such possibilities. The team expressed its satisfaction about women labourers who were deemed more diligent at finishing the work.

**Highlight the fact that gender mainstreaming is an approach, not an additional task:** A point that can and should be made by providing clear examples, including;

- Respecting a ratio of 6 stalls for women to 4 for men does not require the construction of additional facilities. It simply requires dividing the number of stalls per latrine block differently.
- The installation of a locking system on bathroom doors does not cost money and takes little time: A piece of wood trimmed from the facility's frame structure can be nailed inside the door and serve as a secure latch.

**Understand and recognize time constraints inherent to emergency interventions and provide practical, realistic solutions:** and demonstrate it by using examples, such as;

- Instead of facilitating one focus group discussion, divide the team into two in order to conduct simultaneously a separate consultation for women and for men. If a formal meeting cannot be organized, meet the women and men where they usually gather (e.g. market place, water points, etc).



# WHAT WERE THE LESSONS LEARNED?

The experience of designing, developing and implementing the minimum commitments for gender programming produced a number of valuable lessons.

- 1 Participative and evidence-based approach:** Conducting field analysis, allowing affected populations to voice their needs and priorities and to provide local evidence, has proven to be a powerful catalyst both at provincial and national levels, allowing the rapid identification of practical, high impact interventions to be prioritized for making changes to programming.
- 2 The “Quick-Win”:** It is important to understand and acknowledge the context in which WASH, and more generally, emergency practitioners operate. For a quick integration of a gender-sensitive approach in current cluster programming, it is preferable to focus on ways to improve existing processes and activities, not necessitating significant additional time or resources. As such, gender mainstreaming will appear as being more feasible to those involved in programming.
- 3 Definition of operational criteria on gender helps improve programming:** The dialogue that has accompanied the definition and adoption of the DRC WASH commitments has helped cluster members understand that gender differentiated analysis of the needs and rights of girls, boys, men and women in emergency programming is critical at an operational level for better programme design and improved results. Several cluster members now consider the prevention of gender based violence as part of their responsibility.<sup>10</sup> The fact that the commitments are deliberately simple has increased clarity, and made steps towards the demystification of gender programming.
- 4 Activities that seek dramatic behaviour change within a community have less impact:** During emergencies, staff have little time with communities. The involvement of men in hygiene maintenance that was sought by RRM partners had mixed results. In some areas, the cultural roles were so ingrained that women themselves were often resistant to see the men having to clean latrines, highlighting the importance of addressing the specificities of gender relations in the given context.
- 5 Paradigm shift:** The minimum commitments have allowed a shift of perception from gender being seen as abstract and separate from ‘regular emergency programming’ to a vision where it is an objective that can be reached during emergencies. Emphasis is now increasingly being placed not just on issues of service delivery but on participation, access and utilization.
- 6 Gender programming can lead to broader institutional changes:** The systematic and separate consultation of girls and women has helped RRM actors identify needs previously unrecognized. This provided them a better understanding of the importance for gender-balance in programming teams and has led to increased efforts to hire more women.
- 7 Systematic observance of the commitments at grass root level requires more than cluster’s engagement:** While the cluster adopted the minimum commitments in the spring 2009, none of the field actors trained in December 2009 knew them and only a few had heard of their existence. Unfortunately, the managers who attend cluster meetings and are familiar with the gender commitments did not systematically share the information with their teams implementing activities in the field. This demonstrates the complexity of mainstreaming quality related practices in a country as vast as DRC which includes so many different organizations, and multiple layers of personnel. For gender commitments to become standard practice, it is necessary to adopt a multi-faceted strategy that disseminates the message at all levels.
- 8 Successful application of minimum commitments must be accompanied by capacity building interventions:** Adherence to the commitments does not necessarily mean there is genuine understanding of why they were defined in the first place. Practitioners need to not only respect them but to be sensitised as to where they come from and what added value they will bring to the intervention.
- 9 Commitments are better observed when included within a time-bound action plan and M&E framework:** The RRM partners who had drawn up an action plan, with regular monitoring and evaluation of progress made, were more successful than others at implementing the commitments. For instance, the fact that the implementation of separate consultations for women and men was regularly monitored encouraged the team to systematise the approach. In turn, the exchanges that took place during the non-mixed discussion groups gave value to that new consultation process. Staff realised that protection from sexual violence was an inherent part of their work while participation provided additional sense and durability to their interventions.
- 10 Reinforced accountability should be sought through contractual agreements and funding mechanisms:** The fact that UNICEF and the Pooled Fund Unit request the application of the commitments has proved powerful in forcing consideration for gender sensitive programming at a more formal and measurable level. It contributes to the promotion of a shared vision among cluster members on the importance of the issue.

10. Almost half of the WASH projects submitted to the Pooled Fund Unit’s 2009 2nd allocation mention potential risks of gender based violence and/or integrate its prevention into the response. WASH places more importance on the integration of SGBV prevention into its work than other technical clusters do.



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