

## Chapter 4

# Nepal: The European Commission, the U.S., and the Implementation of the World Food Programme's Gender Policy—A Case Study

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Nepal is a landlocked low-income country with a population of slightly over 27 million, with 30 percent living below the national poverty line. The country has recently emerged from eleven years of civil war which, coupled with recurrent natural disasters (drought and flooding), have left a significant part of the population in need of humanitarian relief, including food assistance. Rising food prices pushed an estimated 2.5 million people in the immediate need of food assistance, and another four million are at risk of food insecurity. In addition, approximately 80,000 Bhutanese refugees of Nepali origin entered the country in the early 1990s, escaping a series of restrictive citizenship laws, and are now located in camps in eastern Nepal. Despite the hospitality granted by the Government of Nepal, refugees are not allowed to engage in economic activities outside the camps, and do not have access to land for agricultural production. Thus, they are also heavily dependent on humanitarian assistance.

Women make up half of the total Nepalese population. The Gender-related Development Index shows a reduction in male and female disparities over the 1990s.<sup>1</sup> The Gender Equity Index also showed a seven percent increase in Nepal over the period 2004–07.<sup>2</sup> Despite these improvements, gender disparities remain widespread and deep-rooted in the traditions and practices of the various castes and ethnicities, with significant variations between urban and rural areas.<sup>3</sup> Gender discrimination, caste structure, and ethnicity-based social exclusion are interrelated and mutually reinforcing factors in Nepal. Yet, while exclusion affects both men and women from the same groups, gender discrimination is crosscutting and disproportionately affects women. Issues range from a disparity in literacy rates, access to and benefit from resources such as property and credit, and lack of awareness about key health and reproductive rights, to widespread forms of gender-based violence, such as dowry, early marriage, widowhood, trafficking of women, domestic violence, and conflict-related sexual violence.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> UNFPA, *Gender Equality and Empowerment of women in Nepal* (Katmandu: UNFPA, 2007), p. 15.

<sup>2</sup> Institute of Social Studies Trust (ISST), *Progress of Women in South Asia 2007* (South Asia: ISST supported by UNIFEM (2007), p. viii.

<sup>3</sup> The Nepali population is divided in multiple social groups based on ethnicity, language, geography and caste. The 2001 census identified about 100 ethnic/caste groups and sub-groups in the country. This has significant implications for gender analysis. In fact, while the extent of gender discrimination varies among different groups, women's access to resources such as education is still significantly lower than those of men in all groups. Gender is therefore one of the major discriminatory factors responsible for the disproportionate impact of poverty on women (UNIFEM, 2008, p.9).

<sup>4</sup> Besides the discriminatory nature of such practices, more needs to be done to raise awareness and develop capacity to prevent and respond to the consequences of many cultural malpractices such as Chaupadi, menstruation-related taboos, and dowry. For a more comprehensive discussion of traditionally entrenched discriminatory practices, please refer to UNFPA (2007), op. cit.

The World Food Programme has been in Nepal since 1967, with activities ranging from relief to recovery and development. It works in close cooperation with the host government and relies on a wide range of cooperating partners. The World Food Programme Nepal currently employs a total of 170 staff, 17 international and 153 national.

Food comprises by far the largest share of commitments to humanitarian appeals with 54 percent of the assistance committed through the Common Appeals Process since 2000. Globally, around 75 percent of food aid is channelled through the World Food Programme. The U.S. is the organization's biggest donor,<sup>5</sup> both globally and in Nepal. According to the World Food Programme's Food Aid Information Service,<sup>6</sup> in 2006 the U.S. provided slightly under half of the emergency food aid globally, while the European Commission contributed nine percent.

The Programme's emergency operations in Nepal include food assistance to communities affected by conflict and natural disasters, particularly those in mid- and far-western Nepal and those in the eastern Terai region, as well as to Bhutanese refugees. Special attention is given to food-insecure socially-excluded people. At the moment, the organization provides emergency food assistance to 70,000 persons displaced by flooding in August 2008, 108,000 Bhutanese refugees, and 1.2 million conflict-affected people.

Interestingly, the World Food Programme's intervention covers areas such as mid- and far-western Nepal where gender discrimination is felt to be particularly severe. Gender-related indicators show that overall gains (e.g. in access to education and health services) in the far- and mid-western areas is lower than in other regions. Culture-related gender-based violence is widely practiced there, especially among high castes. In addition, the armed conflict had a tremendous impact on the population in these regions due to the high level of control by the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoists), and resulted in massive displacement, loss of human lives, increased widowhood, and more violence for women.

Experience suggests that food aid has a role to play in redressing gender discrimination in the country.<sup>7</sup> The World Food Programme's intervention builds on the important role women play as producers and managers of food to ensure that food aid benefits all household members.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, food distribution is arranged in a way that does not add burdens or risks to women, e.g. by accommodating distribution schedules to women's needs and concerns, including the risk of attack on the way to and from distribution points. Moreover, increased participation of women and socially-excluded groups in food-related activities has proven useful to contribute to greater social inclusion and equality. But to what extent are these issues integrated into the World Food Programme's work in Nepal? And, more importantly, what is the role of DG ECHO and USAID in supporting the organization's gender-sensitive interventions?

<sup>5</sup> For an updated list of the World Food Programme's (WFP) current donors please look at: [http://www.wfp.org/appeals/Wfp\\_donors/index.asp?section=3&sub\\_section=4](http://www.wfp.org/appeals/Wfp_donors/index.asp?section=3&sub_section=4). Last accessed October 2008.

<sup>6</sup> INTERFAIS is WFP's Food Aid Information Service, which, together with OCHA's Financial Tracking Service is the global official source of data on expenditures on humanitarian assistance.

<sup>7</sup> UNHCR/WFP, *Report of UNHCR/WFP Joint Assessment Mission—Assistance to Bhutanese Refugees in Nepal* (UNHCR/WFP, 2006); Meena Acharya, *Mapping Foreign Aid in Nepal* (UNIFEM, EC, ITC-ILO Partnership on Gender Equality for Development and Peace, 2008), pp. 57, 74, available at [http://www.gendermatters.eu/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=159&Itemid=87](http://www.gendermatters.eu/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=159&Itemid=87)

<sup>8</sup> IFPRI, *Women: The Key to Food Security—Looking Into the Household* (Washington DC: IFPRI, 2000) <http://www.ifpri.org/pubs/ib/ib3.pdf>.

USAID and the European Commission are among the top five donors to World Food Programme relief activities and have promoted gender equality in the country.<sup>9</sup> For example, USAID has been recognized for its support to women's empowerment in health and family planning, as well as women's involvement in hydropower projects and gender equality in natural resources management. The European Commission's efforts are mainly in the sectors of education and the environment.<sup>10</sup>

Besides funding, this case study explores donors' strategies to actively engage in the implementation of lessons with regards to gender in humanitarian assistance and the opportunities and challenges they face. Drawing on the experience of World Food Programme's projects in Nepal, the study addresses donors' support to the implementation of gender equality programming in the context of food aid.

This study is organized in three main sections. Following this introduction, section two focuses on the gender equality frameworks of the World Food Programme, the U.S. and the European Commission. It briefly examines the World Food Programme's and the donors' gender policies and the extent to which mechanisms are in place to support implementation. It also discusses gender-related activities in the context of Nepal. More specifically, the emphasis is on the donors' opportunities and strategies (or lack thereof) to ensure the integration of gender concerns in their humanitarian assistance in Nepal. Section three summarizes the most important points and draws out some key conclusions on the factors that promote and/or hinder the implementation of gender equality and the role of the European Commission and the U.S. therein.

## **Gender Equality Programming in Humanitarian Assistance in Nepal**

This section looks at the gender equality frameworks of the World Food Programme, DG ECHO, and USAID and their operationalization in the context of the World Food Programme's relief activities in Nepal. The extent to which gender considerations are integrated in funding strategies and monitoring and evaluation mechanisms is also considered.

### ***The World Food Programme***

#### *Gender Policy (2003–2007)*

Gender equality and the empowerment of women have been high on the World Food Programme's agenda since the 1985 UN World Conference on Women in Nairobi. The organization's gender policy 2003–2007<sup>11</sup> builds on its predecessor, the Commitments to Women

<sup>9</sup> Source: World Food Programme Country Office Nepal.

<sup>10</sup> Acharya, op. cit. See for example the gender assessment and gender action plan of USAID in Nepal: [http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/PDABU964.pdf](http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PDABU964.pdf). In addition, a EC/UN partnership on Gender Equality for Development and Peace was launched in 2007 ([http://www.unifem.org/news\\_events/story\\_detail.php?StoryID=611](http://www.unifem.org/news_events/story_detail.php?StoryID=611)).

<sup>11</sup> WFP, *Gender Policy (2003–2007), Enhanced Commitments to Women to Ensure Food Security* (Rome: WFP, 2002). However, this policy has not yet been approved by the World Food Programme. Thus, the policy described in the text still refers to the World Food Programme's current policy.

(1996–2001). It reflects commonly agreed and evidence-based<sup>12</sup> lessons on the central role women play as producers and providers of food resources and as the keys to household food security.

Capitalizing on research findings and on the World Food Programme's own experience, the current policy is founded on the principle of equality between men and women, and on empowerment as a means to enable women to actively contribute to decision-making processes and to ensure their access to and control over food. Emphasis is placed on making women the food entitlement holders, promoting women's participation in food management committees, using participatory approaches with both men and women on distribution arrangements, and investing in women's and girls' human capital development through food-supported training activities.

Consistent with the United Nations system-wide policy on gender,<sup>13</sup> the policy promotes a twin-track approach: It calls for the integration of gender in all policies and programs (gender mainstreaming) to ensure that the views and concerns of men and women of all ages are fully integrated in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of programs, while at the same time considering positive measures to close existing gender gaps and achieve gender equality. One such measure is that 70 percent of the participants in food-assisted training activities should be women and adolescent girls.<sup>14</sup>

The development of the Gender Policy (2003–2007) is in itself a good example of the World Food Programme's learning process, highly influenced by donors. In 2001–2002, an extensive review of the implementation of the Commitments to Women confirmed their relevance to the organization's work and the need to strengthen and enhance them. Thematic evaluations revealed that making women the direct recipients of food aid may contribute to increasing their control over the resources distributed, but it may also create additional burdens or expose them to further risks such as attacks while travelling to and from distribution points. Hence, a decision was made to provide women with the food entitlements, while at the same time giving them the flexibility to delegate collection of food to someone else.<sup>15</sup>

Donors' involvement continued throughout the process, and beyond. World Food Programme staff highlighted the key role played by some donors, e.g. the Netherlands, Norway, and Canada, in actively engaging in the discussion on how to improve implementation, while addressing some of the shortcomings of the previous policy. These donors prompted the organization to further refine its gender approach by implementing lessons learned and paying greater attention to newly emerging gender issues. Contrary to those leading donors mentioned above, the U.S. and DG ECHO did not play any specific role in the development or the preceding discussion that led to the approval of the current policy.

<sup>12</sup> International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), *Women: The Key to Food Security—Looking Into the Household* (Washington, DC: IFPRI, 2000), available at <http://www.ifpri.org/pubs/ib/ib3.pdf>; Agnes R. Quisumbing and Ruth S. Meinzen-Dick, *Empowering Women to Achieve Food Security* (Washington, DC: IFPRI, 2001). Also see FAO Focus Women and Food Security at: <http://www.fao.org/FOCUS/E/Women/Sustin-e.htm>.

<sup>13</sup> UN, *United Nations System-Wide Policy on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women: Focusing on Results and Impacts* (New York: UN Chief Executives Board for Coordination, 2006).

<sup>14</sup> WFP (2002), op. cit, p. 21.

<sup>15</sup> For more information on lessons learned and their integration into the new policy, please refer to WFP (2002) *Gender Policy*.

The World Food Programme's pragmatic approach to gender has been applauded by donors and partners, and it is widely recognized within the humanitarian community.<sup>16</sup> The establishment of global and country-level measurable targets clearly provides evidence of the organization's effort to move beyond a mere normative approach towards real implementation, in line with the sector-wide gender approach.<sup>17</sup>

According to a recent end-of-term evaluation, the policy as it was formulated was strategic in addressing women's needs, pragmatic in identifying discrete actions, and relevant as it connected with the organization's aid modalities.<sup>18</sup> Evaluators also underlined the importance of concrete measurable targets for a clear understanding and implementation of the policy by staff and partners. The indicators were judged to be instrumental in advocating for gender equality and targeted measures with NGO partners and government counterparts. For example, the policy is generally annexed to field-level agreements and targets are discussed with partners as part of the World Food Programme's implementation modalities.

Yet, the picture looks different from below. Implementation is not always as straightforward as it appears, and varies greatly from one context to another. After analyzing these difficulties in implementation, this study will focus on the role of the transatlantic partners in supporting gender-sensitive programs.

### *Gender in Humanitarian Assistance in Nepal*

Project documents state compliance with the World Food Programme's gender policy (2003–2007) in Nepal. For example, the organization's efforts to increase women's participation in camp management committees through revision of the respective guidelines and sensitization of partners led to an increase of female representation from 27 percent in 2001 to 52 percent in 2007.<sup>19</sup>

As for assistance to Bhutanese refugees, the World Food Programme together with the UN Refugee Agency supported the establishment and strengthening of Community Watch Teams in camps to address and prevent, among others, reported incidents of gender-based violence.<sup>20</sup> The issue of gender-based violence is well known in the camps and has been variously addressed by these two organizations.

<sup>16</sup> Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, *Moving Up the Food Chain: Lessons from Gender Mainstreaming at the World Food Programme* (New York: Women's Commission, 2006).

<sup>17</sup> These targets are: 1. Awareness raising on nutrition, health, caring practices and HIV prevention to be provided to at least half of the pregnant and lactating mothers and adolescent girls assisted under nutrition and training interventions (country level); 2. Fifty (50) percent of the students in World Food Programme-assisted primary schools to be girls (global level); 3. Provision of take-home ration for girls if there is a 15-percent or greater gender gap in primary school enrolment or attendance, and 25-percent or greater in secondary schools (country level); 4. Seventy (70) percent of the participants in food-assisted training activities to be women and adolescent girls (country level); 5. Women to derive at least 50 percent of the benefits from the assets created (country level); 6. Household ration card to be issued in the woman's name (country level); 7. Women's equal representation, also at the executive-level, in food-related bodies (country level); and 8. Gender-sensitive assessment, vulnerability analysis and contingency planning (country level). For a comprehensive account of the Enhanced Commitments to Women and World Food Programme's targets, please refer to World Food Programme's Gender Policy (2003–2007).

<sup>18</sup> WFP, *End-of-Term Evaluation of WFP's Gender Policy (2003–2007), Summary Report: Strong Foundations, Time for More* (Rome: WFP, 2008), p. 5.

<sup>19</sup> Source Standard Project Reports 2007 for Nepal.

<sup>20</sup> UNHCR/WFP (2006), op. cit., p. 22.

Besides activities in the refugee camps, in February 2008, the World Food Programme, in collaboration with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the UN Population Fund, trained frontline staff and partners on prevention and response to gender-based violence in emergencies. This initiative was conducted within the framework of the roll-out of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Guidelines for Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Settings. Although both the U.S. and the European Commission are members of this group in Nepal, informants did not report any specific activity undertaken by them in this respect.

In spite of these positive achievements of the World Food Programme, challenges remain. According to field staff, *the World Food Programme has been highly successful in meeting the commitments of their gender policy with respect to securing 50 percent women's participation in the decision-making body of users' committees, maintaining smaller bag size which can be carried by women, and issuing ration cards to women as food entitlement holders.* However, reality shows that only about half of the food entitlements are granted to women in spite of the 100 percent target.<sup>21</sup> More efforts are needed to fully mainstream gender in needs assessments, vulnerability analysis, and in evaluation. For example, field informants reported few gender-related efforts in the last World Food Programme's emergency operation for flood-affected people. A 2008 evaluation of the organization's emergency operation in Nepal described a reality whereby it is common not to have time to address questions of gender, when the priority is saving lives.<sup>22</sup>

Finally, discussions held with World Food Programme staff and partners during field-level workshops highlighted the need to do more to understand, prevent, and address the many forms of violence prevailing in the country, also within the framework of food distribution.

### ***Monitoring and Evaluation***

The World Food Programme has institutionalized a series of mechanisms to ensure learning and accountability with a view to improve performance.

#### *Monitoring*

Project monitoring relies heavily on information collected yearly at the field level. The Standard Project Reports and the Annual Performance Report are the World Food Programme's main performance monitoring tools.

The tools contain gender-specific indicators reflecting the organization's focus on gender equality and women's empowerment through active participation in food-related activities and access and control over the resources distributed. According to World Food Programme staff from headquarters, there is no systematic follow-up with the transatlantic donors on these reports. This means that, at best, donors' feedback on specific operations is directly channelled to relevant country offices. In the case of Nepal, however, none of the informants recalled any follow-up made by either the U.S. or the European Commission.

<sup>21</sup> World Food Programme Standard Project Reports 2007 for Nepal.

<sup>22</sup> WFP, *Report of the Evaluation of Nepal* (Rome: WFP, 2008), p. 21.

One could then wonder how much the information collected through the organization's monitoring system actually contributes to donors' learning on specific projects and on the agency's performance on gender. Generally speaking, the learning value of the information collected is limited. In Nepal, field staff dutifully collect sex-disaggregated data and track compliance with the three corporate indicators. Yet, qualitative inquiry and analysis are often lacking.

Adding to a number of weaknesses of the World Food Programme's monitoring system,<sup>23</sup> another problem with the information collected is that quantity is often prioritized over quality, and output over outcome.

### *Evaluation*

Responsibility for evaluation in the World Food Programme is shared between headquarters, regional bureaus, and country offices, with learning and accountability being the two main pillars of the organization's evaluation policy.<sup>24</sup> Evidence suggests that analysis of gender issues varies greatly from country to country and in relation to those conducting the evaluation.<sup>25</sup> The lack of a standardized approach to gender in evaluation is often compounded by the fact that some evaluators have difficulty conducting a thorough gender analysis. Thus, although gender considerations are incorporated in the Programme's monitoring and evaluation guidelines, they are not systematically reflected in evaluations. The World Food Programme is currently developing a standardized reporting format which includes a gender section<sup>26</sup> to ensure that gender dimensions are consistently and systematically investigated and integrated in evaluation reports.

### *Funding*

The World Food Programme's monitoring and evaluation practices, then, integrate gender concerns. Yet, are these findings actually used and acted upon by donors to promote a more effective implementation of lessons with respect to gender equality?

One informant stated that *there is no impact on funding with regards to what the World Food Programme does specifically in Nepal. The donors' funding strategies don't look into this aspect of programming per se. They assume we do it.*

Headquarter-based donor relations officers serve as the primary link between the World Food Programme and donors. However, as donors become more decentralized, fundraising happens increasingly at country level.

<sup>23</sup> The following issues were identified in relation to the World Food Programme's monitoring system: 1. Lack of field staff time for outcome-level data collection; 2. Lack of analytical skills; 3. Poor use of findings to gauge performance; 4. Low prioritization on the part of management; and 5. Lack of link between M&E and resources, i.e. the effectiveness of the country office M&E system has little to do with how the office is resourced in the future (WFP, *Summary Report of the Evaluation of PRROs* (Rome: WFP, 2006)).

<sup>24</sup> WFP, *WFP's Evaluation Policy* (Rome: WFP, 2003).

<sup>25</sup> These considerations are based on the author's first-hand experience as gender officer in WFP.

<sup>26</sup> OEDE is in the final stages of establishing the Evaluation Quality Assurance System (EQAS) whereby covering of gender issues will be an integral part of each and every evaluation. This was also included in WFP's Management Plan WFP/EB.2/2007/5-A/1 Annex III, para 7, page 98.

In Nepal, needs assessment and analysis serve as the basis for project design. Project documents are then sent to headquarters for revision and approval by the Executive Board in which main donors like USAID and the European Commission are represented. The formulation and implementation of funding strategies for approved operations is a joint responsibility of the division of donor relations at headquarters and the country office.

For the World Food Programme's major donors, such as the European Commission and the U.S. Government, a global agreement is in place, which details the agreed-upon rules, regulations, and procedures for contributions and facilitates the release of subsequent contributions, also at the field level.

Experience reveals that gender is not a key element in either DG ECHO's or USAID's strategies and funding priorities in Nepal. According to the implementing agency, *funding priorities are more related to whether we are doing humanitarian vs. development activities; whether we are being environmentally friendly; whether we are involved in joint programming with UN agencies or doing capacity building with Government. Gender is mentioned as a criterion but not a priority for funding decisions.*

In general, field informants recognized that commitment to gender in project proposals may increase the chances to receive funding; however, *gender alone cannot be considered as a deciding factor.* A confirmation of this came from a recent emergency operation, which got funded in spite of the absence of a clear gender analysis, with no demand from the donors for additional gender-related information and analysis.

## The European Commission in Nepal

### *Institutional Set-Up*

The European Commission Delegation to Nepal is responsible for the implementation of the EC external assistance to Nepal and humanitarian assistance for uprooted people. Humanitarian assistance, including food aid, is managed by DG ECHO, which has a separate office in the country.

### *Humanitarian Assistance*

DG ECHO is a major donor of humanitarian assistance in Nepal, where it aims at supporting the rural population of Nepal affected by the conflict, in particular women and children, in the areas of health and water and sanitation; and at providing protection to the population of Nepal affected by the conflict, in particular returning internally displaced persons, women and children.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>27</sup> European Commission, *Commission Decision on the Financing of a Global Plan for Humanitarian Operations from the Budget of the European Communities in Nepal* (Brussels: EC, 2008), p. 3.

### *Gender in Humanitarian Assistance in Nepal*

A study on food security funded by the European Commission identified gender, ethnicity, and caste-based discrimination among the major causes of food insecurity in Nepal because they put constraints on vulnerable and socially excluded groups in accessing basic resources, such as education, health, employment, and the full enjoyment of their human rights.<sup>28</sup> Yet, evidence shows that gender remains a secondary concern in the Commission's humanitarian assistance to Nepal in all sectors, including food security.<sup>29</sup>

According to DG ECHO informants, only the European Commission's Regional Office in Delhi is mandated with implementing the gender policy through its separate gender division. There is no gender focal point at the country level, neither in the Delegation nor in the DG ECHO country office.

According to a UNFPA study<sup>30</sup> and field-level interviewees, both the European Commission and the U.S. Government played a role in the increased attention to gender considerations in programming observed in recent years. However, interviewees also felt that more should and could be done, as stronger attention by donors to gender issues would certainly spur better performance by the World Food Programme in this respect.

Field practitioners, for example, seemed to know little about donors' specific policies and practices in this field, while all World Food Programme projects are bound to mainstream gender and address the special needs of women and marginalized groups at each step of the project cycle. Thus, the World Food Programme's gender policy appears to be the primary framework of reference for the agency's gender-related activities.

Limited knowledge and visibility over donors' decision-making processes with respect to gender issues was also commonly found among informants.

### *Monitoring and Evaluation*

Project managers in DG ECHO Nepal are responsible for regular monitoring of implementing agencies' performance through field-visits, joint assessments, and review of the implementation of programs.

Evaluations and field visits are ideal opportunities for information sharing between the implementing agency and donors. Field informants report that gender issues generally do get discussed with the European Commission and the U.S. Government during such visits and are usually reflected in mission reports. However, they are not aware of any specific criteria set by the two donors to measure implementation successes and shortcomings. DG ECHO staff reported checking gender mainstreaming in project proposals as well as reports from the implementing agency, yet performance on gender issues *per se* is not specifically assessed.

<sup>28</sup> David Seddon and Jagannath Adhikari, *Conflict and Food Security in Nepal: A Preliminary Analysis* (Kathmandu: Rural Reconstruction Nepal (funded by the European Commission), 2003), p. 23.

<sup>29</sup> Acharya (2008), *op. cit.*, p. 65.

<sup>30</sup> UNFPA (2007), *op. cit.*, p. 76.

## *Funding*

After the U.S. Government, DG ECHO is the second biggest donor to the World Food Programme's relief operations in Nepal. According to World Food Programme statistics, the agency has contributed a total of more than \$19 million to the operations in Nepal since 2003.<sup>31</sup>

Consistent with the European Commission's advocacy for untied, flexible, and cash-only food aid, its contributions to the World Food Programme are solely in cash. The Commission is a decentralized donor and its Delegations/DG ECHO Offices strongly influence the allocation of funding. Thus, although decisions over funding for multilateral organizations are taken in Brussels, they are informed by appraisal and analysis from DG ECHO country and regional offices. Concretely, the office Nepal informs the World Food Programme of the possibility of funding and may discuss the content of the Programme's project documents. Then the World Food Programme headquarter submits a formal request to DG ECHO Brussels on the basis of these country documents. This request is followed by appraisal and analysis at both DG ECHO's country and headquarters level. The financing decision is made by the DG ECHO headquarters desk officer.

Although the European Commission generally requires gender to be integrated in project proposals and, as informants revealed, DG ECHO has shown interest in gender issues in the World Food Programme's programming during field visits and evaluations, inclusion of gender does not appear to be key for the allocation of funding to Program. According to the World Food Programme, *donors have shown more interest in addressing gender issues in program implementation rather than decision making of funding based on gender issues.*

According to a mapping study on foreign aid in Nepal, this may be due to the lack of capacity and expertise on gender issues within the European Commission offices in Nepal, which constrains the ability of the office to analyze and monitor funded projects from a gender perspective.

As for assistance to Bhutanese refugees, DG ECHO officials reported *gender issues to be an important component in funding to World Food Programme with gender based violence being taken into consideration.* Activities range from promotion of female participation in camp management committees, women's control of food in relief distributions, and decision-making on food utilization at the household level, to awareness and sensitization activities on gender based violence for staff and partners.

In general however, activities reflect the implementing agency's concern for gender issues, while no specific emphasis or funds are allocated to them by DG ECHO. This echoes a general lack of specific attention to gender issues in DG ECHO food aid activities and funding strategies. In the EC's latest funding decision on food aid, gender is only mentioned generically in relation to evaluations.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>31</sup> [http://home.wfp.org/dwreps/statistics/public/FDD\\_reports/FDD\\_Funding\\_Hist\\_Recipient.pdf](http://home.wfp.org/dwreps/statistics/public/FDD_reports/FDD_Funding_Hist_Recipient.pdf), last accessed October 2008.

<sup>32</sup> European Commission, *Humanitarian Aid Decision—Food Aid* (Brussels: EC, ECHO/-FA/BUD/2008/01000, 2008), p. 23.

## The U.S. in Nepal

### *Institutional Set-Up*

USAID Nepal is responsible for both development and humanitarian activities in the country. The Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance, the Office of Food for Peace, the Office of Transition Initiatives and the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration are the four main sources of U.S. humanitarian funding to Nepal.<sup>33</sup> Food for Peace's in-kind donations are the primary source of U.S. support to the World Food Programme Nepal.

Food for Peace has no staff in Nepal. Thus, USAID's General Development Office Director Nepal is the organization's main contact person at the country level. A gender advisor works at the office of the Director in Nepal. Furthermore, the Food for Peace Office in Washington works with the World Food Programme at both headquarter and the country level.

### *Humanitarian Assistance*

The U.S. Government Global Strategic Plan 2007–2012 for Nepal<sup>34</sup> articulates USAID's policy for Nepal, including humanitarian assistance. The policy includes the provision of food assistance to drought-affected populations and Bhutanese refugees; reintegration of and humanitarian assistance to displaced populations; and assistance to communities for developing natural disaster preparedness and response capabilities.<sup>35</sup>

Humanitarian food aid is mostly channelled to the World Food Programme in order to support Bhutanese refugees and conflict-affected populations, including displaced people and communities affected by natural disasters in mid- and far-western Nepal.

### *Gender in Humanitarian Assistance in Nepal*

While gender is an important dimension in USAID/Nepal's development activities, its consideration in humanitarian assistance does not appear to be as high.<sup>36</sup> The Food for Peace strategy for 2006–2010 explicitly refers to the need to involve women to the maximum extent possible as participants as well as beneficiaries of food-related programs. It also calls for greater efforts on the side of partner organizations to ensure that *their program designs include strategies to address gender issues and objectives*.<sup>37</sup> However, with respect to gender in relief food aid, U.S. officials reported that *Food for Peace does not have specific gender-related criteria for deci-*

<sup>33</sup> USAID, *Nepal—Humanitarian Assistance, Fact Sheet* (Washington, DC: USAID, 2007), available at [http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/PNADJ147.pdf](http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNADJ147.pdf).

<sup>34</sup> USDOS/USAID, *Strategic Plan 2007-2012* (Washington, DC: USDOS/USAID, 2007).

<sup>35</sup> USAID Nepal website: <http://nepal.usaid.gov/about.php?pid=55>, last accessed October 2008.

<sup>36</sup> According to a 2002 Gender Assessment and Gender Action Plan of USAID Nepal, the office has been at the cutting edge in USAID's gender initiatives. It was the first office to elevate women's empowerment at the strategic objective level to then integrate it into all strategic objectives (Mari Clarke, *Gender Assessment and Gender Action Plan of USAID/Nepal* (Washington, DC: WID TECH, 2002)).

<sup>37</sup> USAID/FFP, *Strategic Plan 2006–2010* (Washington, DC: USAID, 2005), p. 38, available at [http://www.usaid.gov/our\\_work/humanitarian\\_assistance/ffp/ffp\\_strategy.2006\\_2010.pdf](http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/humanitarian_assistance/ffp/ffp_strategy.2006_2010.pdf).

*sions on emergency program resources but we look to fund the best, most well-rounded programs and, in most countries, gender plays a role. It obviously does in Nepal.*

The 2005 Field Operations Guide sets the framework for USAID's disaster assessment and response capacity and strategy. Sensitivity to gender issues is recommended across sectors, types of activity, and phases of the project cycle.<sup>38</sup> On food aid, gender-related security and non-discrimination in food distribution are mentioned together with the need for sex-disaggregated data. Also, participation of women in planning and implementation phases is indicated as key to addressing women's specific needs and concerns.<sup>39</sup>

As for gender in humanitarian assistance, U.S.-funded gender-related activities seem to focus primarily on prevention and response to gender-based violence in the protection sector. In fact, gender-based violence appears as the sole gender-related issue of concern in humanitarian assistance.<sup>40</sup> However, prevention and response to gender based violence is not systematically mainstreamed across sectors. There is no mention, for example, of gender-based violence within the context of food distribution.

This appears to be the case in Nepal as well. Gender-based violence is an issue of concern for the World Food Programme, and something the organization has been working on for some time now. However, there is no support for this activity provided by USAID/Nepal. The fact that World Food Programme receives commodities and not funds may act as an impediment from even being considered for the respective funds. As a USAID/Nepal official said: *Formal programs on gender-based violence or protection are not linked to our support of the World Food Programme.*

### ***Monitoring and Evaluation***

Gender is not considered a separate topic to be reported on in isolation; rather, the gender mainstreaming approach is expected to apply throughout the project cycle.

The above-mentioned Field Operations Guide provides formats and reference materials, such as sector-wide checklists and indicators for assessing and reporting on emergency situations in a gender-sensitive manner. Thus, it would be reasonable to expect that gender issues are taken into account when monitoring and evaluating World Food Programme's performance in Nepal. Interestingly, though, World Food Programme informants do not seem to know of any criteria used by the U.S. to measure the agency's performance on gender. This, at a minimum, means that USAID's concerns for gender issues in the implementation of food aid activities have not been shared with the World Food Programme.

As stated by Food for Peace, *when we monitor our program, we would normally look at distribution by gender to make sure that there were no gender biases.* This, at best, means making sure that beneficiary caseload is disaggregated by sex.

<sup>38</sup> USAID, *Field Operations Guide for Disaster Assessment and Response* (Washington, DC: USAID, 2005), available at [http://www.usaid.gov/our\\_work/humanitarian\\_assistance/disaster\\_assistance/resources/pdf/fog\\_v4.pdf](http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/humanitarian_assistance/disaster_assistance/resources/pdf/fog_v4.pdf).

<sup>39</sup> USAID (2005), op. cit., pp. II-19, 26.

<sup>40</sup> USAID/OFDA, *OFDA Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2007* (Washington, DC: USAID, 2007), available at [http://www.usaid.gov/our\\_work/humanitarian\\_assistance/disaster\\_assistance/publications/annual\\_reports/pdf/AR2007.pdf](http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/humanitarian_assistance/disaster_assistance/publications/annual_reports/pdf/AR2007.pdf).

In Nepal, and with regards to the World Food Programme, reliance on the organization's monitoring and evaluation system is evident. Partners' reports are the primary monitoring tools, complemented by formal and informal discussions and direct on-site observations to gauge progress and results.<sup>41</sup> Informants reported that they do not know of any reporting requirements set by the U.S. other than what is already included in World Food Programme's reports and U.S.-specific *ad hoc* annual reports on World Food Programme operations. These last reports do not normally contain gender-specific information other than sex-disaggregated data on beneficiaries. Field staff do recall occasional follow-up by USAID on the World Food Programme's performance on gender issues in Nepal.

In sum, the effectiveness of USAID emergency food aid is measured by the number of beneficiaries who receive food aid disaggregated by sex in each country in which it operates, including Nepal. Gender is only mentioned in one indicator out of seven and only for activities on prevention and response to gender-based violence. Thus, one can conclude that gender is not a critical dimension in USAID's performance measurement.

### *Funding*

The U.S. is the largest donor to the World Food Programme in Nepal, with donations worth more than \$33 million since 2003.<sup>42</sup>

USAID/Nepal formulates an annual strategic plan with details of how the aid will be used and the amount of resources needed. The plan is then reviewed by USAID headquarters in Washington D.C., and incorporated into the President's annual foreign assistance bill submitted to the U.S. Congress. Once approved, USAID/Nepal negotiates the release of funds to relevant stakeholders like the World Food Programme.

Similarly to the European Commission, gender does not appear to be a key element in the allocation of U.S. funding to the World Food Programme. World Food Programme informants also reported that the funding policies of both donors do not set incentives for integrating gender equality.

World Food Programme informants agreed that stronger emphasis by donors on gender issues would provide leverage for more effective performance by their organization in this respect. As one informant put it: *The transatlantic donors' role, for the time being, in gender equality programming is nonexistent. If it was pushed by them, the World Food Programme might take the issue more seriously.* In concrete terms, this could translate into demands for greater gender analysis in needs assessments, gender-sensitive project documents, and gender-responsive progress assessments, performance monitoring and indicators.

On the other hand, given the emphasis placed by USAID on protection and gender-based violence, capacity building for the World Food Programme on gender within food distribution should be considered. This, however, would require USAID to go beyond the traditional per-

<sup>41</sup> USAID, *Field Operations Guide for Disaster Assessment and Response* (Washington: USAID, 2005), p. H-2, available at [http://www.usaid.gov/our\\_work/humanitarian\\_assistance/disaster\\_assistance/resources/pdf/fog\\_v4.pdf](http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/humanitarian_assistance/disaster_assistance/resources/pdf/fog_v4.pdf).

<sup>42</sup> \$33,120,832. [http://home.wfp.org/dwreps/statistics/public/FDD\\_reports/FDD\\_Funding\\_Hist\\_Recipient.pdf](http://home.wfp.org/dwreps/statistics/public/FDD_reports/FDD_Funding_Hist_Recipient.pdf). Last accessed October 2008 (intranet, access restricted to WFP's users.)

ception of the World Food Programme as a mere emergency food-aid arm and consider the interconnections between food aid and gender.

## Summary of Findings and Conclusions

This section summarizes findings on the extent to which gender considerations are integrated into the humanitarian assistance provided by both the U.S. and the European Commission in Nepal and provides some analysis of the possible reasons behind shortcomings. Conclusions are not intended to provide a complete picture of gender equality programming in humanitarian assistance in Nepal. Instead, they present a snapshot of the situation with respect to the role of the two transatlantic donors in the implementation of the World Food Programme's gender commitments.

Given the similarities between the two donors, conclusions are mostly general and apply to both. However, differences between the two donors are also highlighted. The analysis has been organized around three main areas: operations, including funding and programming; coordination; and monitoring and evaluation.

### *Operations*

According to scholars and practitioners alike, in the rush to provide humanitarian response, the question of gender is often perceived as a luxury, leading to difficulties of integrating a gender perspective in this field. When a disaster hits, humanitarian actors move quickly to meet basic survival needs like food, and protect survivors, while little or no time is left to analyze issues such as consumption patterns within households, or men's and women's roles and relationships within affected communities and adapt the response accordingly. Adding to this, while donors' sensitivity to gender issues in humanitarian assistance is greater in sectors like education, nutrition, and health, attention to gender in relief food aid still lags behind. As respondents pointed out, even when gender-specific funds do exist, they are either not under the humanitarian aid heading, or they are not granted to the World Food Programme. In this respect, the focus of the study on the World Food Programme's activities allowed to identify challenges and gaps on the side of DG ECHO and USAID that may not be visible in other sectors.

Lack of gender expertise is another hindering factor. While in theory there is an increased recognition that gender analysis contributes to good programming, this is not yet understood in the practice of humanitarian aid. Conducting a gender analysis is perceived as an additional burden to the already heavy workload of field staff.

The following factors contribute to this reality:

#### *Factors Relating to the World Food Programme:*

- **The World Food Programme's strength on gender.** First of all, as some of the respondents pointed out, gender equality is already an integral part of the World Food Programme's programming in relief activities, and it is well articulated in the agency's

gender policy. Donors' reliance on the organization's ability to pursue gender equality in its programs may be one of the reasons for their limited emphasis on this issue—which may turn out to be an enabler as well as a stumbling block to donors' more effective implementation of gender commitments. On the one hand, the World Food Programme's gender policy guarantees that certain issues are taken into consideration in planning and implementing of humanitarian assistance. On the other, however, blind reliance on the agency's ability to act gender-sensibly limits donors' engagement and opportunity to leverage more effective and systematic implementation with respect to gender.

- **Food aid only.** Gender-sensitive food aid programming is further limited by the limited attention given by DG ECHO and USAID to gender in food aid programming and the clear-cut separation of food aid from other sectors of relief intervention.

The World Food Programme receives most donor support to address food insecurity and the emergency food needs of people, even in the absence of a profound gender analysis. This, in theory, should not imply lack of attention to gender aspects because gender is causally related to food insecurity and vulnerability. In practice, however, both the U.S. Government and the European Commission pay little attention to gender in their funding decisions relating to food aid.

Moreover, the World Food Programme is perceived as merely a logistical tool. This further prevents donors from considering supporting the Programme in other activities that are not strictly and directly labelled 'food distribution', even when their link to this activity is clear. Protection and gender-based violence are a good example in this respect. The protection risks of women and children in relation to food distribution have been well documented. The World Food Programme is often the only agency at the forefront in complex humanitarian emergencies and the one closest to beneficiary communities. Thus, it is well placed to address protection risks within its operational framework. In the case of Nepal, while both donors do contribute to activities on gender-based violence, for example, in refugee camps, these funds are usually not granted to World Food Programme. On the U.S. side, as indicated throughout the study, this is due to the clear-cut institutional distinction between food aid (Food for Peace) and other sectors of humanitarian intervention at USAID. As for DG ECHO, officials reported that gender and/or protection-specific funds are mainly channelled to UNFPA.

#### *Factors Relating to the Donors:*

There are, in addition, other factors that may act as impediments to the full integration of gender equality in humanitarian activities that are mostly at the institutional level and relate to the way gender is articulated in donors' policies and organizational arrangements.

- **Development vs. relief.** The first is the separation between humanitarian and development aid in donors' foreign assistance. Humanitarian assistance is an autonomous strategic priority, clearly separated from development. In Nepal, this is also translated

in DG ECHO's being physically separated from the office of the European Commission Delegation.

Gender has been mostly articulated in relation to development. Only in recent years has there been an increased attention to gender issues in emergencies. While gender mainstreaming should apply equally to development as well as to humanitarian interventions, practice shows that a clear-cut distinction between development and relief with respect to gender is still evident in the perception as well as in the action of donors in spite of the increased efforts towards linking relief, rehabilitation, and development and to ensure coherence, coordination, and alignment of humanitarian interventions with other instruments of foreign assistance. The European Commission toolkit on gender mainstreaming, for example, applies solely to activities in the development realm, while DG ECHO is in the process of developing a gender policy for humanitarian interventions separate from the existing EC's policy framework on gender.

- **Rights-based vs. needs-based approaches.** The traditional tension between rights-based and needs-based approaches may also contribute to move relief further away from development. Humanitarian aid is viewed by donors primarily as a response to the immediate survival needs of the affected populations. Gender equality, on the other hand, relies solidly on the recognition of rights of individuals and their inviolability by its own nature. Humanitarian crises have different impacts on men and women. Differences, however, are not limited to their practical needs, but also to the capacities, priorities, roles, and responsibilities men and women have in certain situations, and their relation herein. These may not be captured by a strictly needs-based approach.

Should donors effectively mainstream gender, this tension would not exist, as all these issues would be factored in the way assistance is provided. For instance, programs targeted to meet men's as well as women's needs and priorities in a given situation would necessarily entail the analysis of their roles and relationships, differential power, and access to and control over resources, which altogether forms the basis of gender analysis. However, evidence shows that this is not yet the case. In the above-cited response to the flood emergency, it was enough to know the number of affected people disaggregated by sex, while issues such as how to ensure that both men and women could participate and benefit equally from the assistance provided were left to the discretion of the implementing agency.

- **Decentralization.** Another possible hindering factor relates to the fact that while operations have been highly decentralized, responsibility for gender issues remains mainly at headquarters or regional levels. While major funding decisions are ultimately taken at headquarters level, they are informed by analysis and data gathered in the field. Some capacity to deal with gender issues is therefore needed at all levels. However, this does not seem to be the case in Nepal.

DG ECHO officials reported that there is no gender focal point in either the European Commission Delegation or the DG ECHO office in Nepal. Only the European Commission Delegation Regional Office in Delhi has a separate gender division. The

technical support provided for the integration of country-specific gender issues may not be enough to ensure effective gender mainstreaming in donors' humanitarian programming. USAID/Nepal, on the contrary, has a gender focal point who works under the responsibility of the Director, the World Food Programme's focal person in the country. This, however, does not appear to be enough to ensure systematic integration of gender issues in relief food aid either.

Generally speaking, while centralization may be useful to ensure a coherent approach to gender throughout programs and across countries, it may result in a discrepancy between policy and actual implementation if not accompanied by specific capacity and understanding in the field. Therefore, more efforts are needed to ensure understanding and implementation of a gender-sensitive approach at the field level and to build the capacity of staff in this regard. Capacity building and information sharing with partners is also key, as they hold responsibility for implementation of specific activities. The simple fact that World Food Programme staff members are not aware of the criteria used by donors to measure implementation of gender-related activities is a clear indication that donors' strategies and monitoring mechanisms are not well shared with partners in the field. Moreover, the World Food Programme's efforts to increase capacity and work on protection and gender-based violence in food distribution would strongly benefit from donor support.

- **Twin-track approach.** Finally, and strictly related to the above, practice shows that the gender mainstreaming concept carries the risk that gender concerns and the need for specific actions to ensure gender equality can become invisible when included under the umbrella of 'having been mainstreamed.' This risk is implicit in some of the responses provided by World Food Programme staff when saying donors *assume we do it*, or that integration of gender concerns *is a given for the two donors*. Reality reveals that it is not, and assumptions or reliance by donors on the World Food Programme's approach to gender are not enough to ensure implementation. This is why a twin-track approach is needed. While fully striving for gender mainstreaming, specific actions should be taken to ensure actual translation of commitments into day-to-day practice. This includes, for example, the appointment of well trained gender focal points within donors' field offices.<sup>43</sup>

## Coordination

At the country-level, donors take part in various coordination mechanisms aimed at ensuring program harmonization, coherence and coordination. However, information from the field suggests that these forums are used mainly to share information on activities, while it is difficult to assess their impact on donors' policies and programs. Donors do not seem to use these opportunities to advocate for greater gender sensitivity in humanitarian assistance. The Euro-

<sup>43</sup> According to a recent study of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) on the practice of gender equality programming, the paucity of gender advisors and lack of training on gender at the field level are the two main obstacles to successful gender mainstreaming (OECD, *Gender Equality and Aid Delivery: What Has Changed in Development Cooperation Agencies since 1999?* (Paris: OECD, 2007), p. 31, available at <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/44/0/38773781.pdf>).

pean Commission's commitment to engage more effectively and substantially in these meetings and to transform them from mere 'information sharing' into influential planning platforms is commendable.<sup>44</sup>

### *Monitoring and Evaluation*

Despite the recognition of the importance of monitoring and evaluation to ensure the implementation of gender-related commitments, this remains one of the weakest points of the mainstreaming strategies of both donors. Evidence from the field suggests that gender issues do usually get discussed during program review meetings and field visits; however, neither specific follow-up on these issues nor changes in funding decisions were reported. As some informants put it, stronger emphasis on this by the two key donors would certainly spur better performance by the World Food Programme.

Another observed factor is that monitoring, both at the agency's and donors' levels, is mostly focused on outputs rather than on outcomes, and quantitative data dominate over qualitative information. In fact, the World Food Programme's corporate performance measurement and reporting systems suffer limitations, particularly with respect to results at the outcome level. This hinders the donors' ability to gauge the World Food Programme's performance. Gender sensitive process monitoring should be strengthened with a focus on outcomes and impacts.

With respect to evaluations, the lack of a standardized approach to gender issues and poor competence on the side of evaluators in undertaking a thorough gender analysis are further impediments.

By addressing these hindering factors and focusing their policies and funding decisions more clearly on gender, the European Commission and the U.S. Government could help their implementing partners in developing more gender-sensitive programs. It is widely acknowledged that this would enhance the effectiveness of humanitarian activities.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> EC, "An EU Aid Effectiveness Roadmap to Accra and Beyond: From Rhetoric to Action, Hastening the Pace of Reforms", *Commission Staff Working Paper* (Brussels: EC, 2008), p. 44.

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