

CONVERSATIONS WITH RC/HCs: BEST PRACTICE SERIES



Indonesia RC/HC El-Mostafa Benlamlih on strategic steps to integrate gender responsiveness into disaster management

El-Mostafa Benlamlih was appointed RC/HC in Indonesia in 2008 and later head of the UN Information Centre (UNIC). He has had a distinguished career with the United Nations, most recently serving as RC in Saudi Arabia, Côte d'Ivoire and Kuwait. As acting Deputy Director of the UNDP Bureau for Arab States in 2006, he contributed to the restructuring of that Bureau.

BEST PRACTICE: Under the leadership of Mr. Benlamlih, the Indonesia UN Country Team realized that mechanisms and resources were not in place to ensure that gender-responsiveness in UN development programming flowed synergistically into humanitarian action and disaster management. The UNCT called on the IASC Gender Standby Capacity – GenCap – to deploy a gender specialist to assist in analysing and taking pivotal gender equality steps to bridge humanitarian and development programming. Mr. Benlamlih explains the progress that is unfolding in this interview of February 2009.

Why bring in a GenCap Adviser to Indonesia?

A GenCap Adviser is an inter-agency resource specifically focused on humanitarian action including disaster preparedness and response. Agencies routinely focus their gender equality resources on their agency-specific programming in a development area.

The United Nations has gender capacity but we needed to channel it more effectively into inter-agency collaboration. We envisioned a GenCap Adviser as a catalyst: to bring gender equality focus into our work, which aims to build a strong bridge between our humanitarian and development efforts.

As you know, Indonesia is a crisis-prone country. Under such circumstances, it offers the best opportunities to build resilience to crises and disasters within the mainstream development planning. Making sure that there is a clear gender equality focus is important for effectiveness and sustainability.

What was the major outcome?

The UNCT now has a *Gender Strategy Document for Inter-Agency Collaboration* and we are actively putting the strategy into operation. Through our UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) and joint programming process, we are further developing the sense of ownership of this strategy and making sure it is optimised. Bringing in the GenCap Adviser closer to the UNDAF and joint programming process helps with the identification, for the UNCT, of key opportunities,

appropriate approaches and entry points for gender equality promotion. The GenCap Adviser will also help IASC clusters and other inter-agency activities, like the reporting and advocacy efforts of the Commission on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The gender specialist will also provide support to the UN human resources network, which is taking the lead on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA).

Finally, we are using MDG baselines as a joint UN design and management tool for the operationalization of the UNDAF. The GenCap Adviser will make sure that MDGs and gender equality are thoroughly grasped and built into our baseline data.

To me, it is an important ground-breaking space that UN Indonesia is entering: creating strategic gender equality mechanisms to encompass both humanitarian action and development. This synergy is critical. We need to learn how to do it better and deeper. We will carry this forward in this year's initial work for next UNDAF: gender and social analysis will be embedded in support of overall development, disaster risk reduction and preparedness programming.

How is the GenCap Adviser helping with gender equality in your day-to-day work?

The GenCap Adviser helped the UN gender focal points in identifying the core content of the Gender Strategy for Inter-Agency Collaboration. The ideas and strategic

direction came from the UN gender team. We realize now that what was called the Gender Technical Working Group (GTWG) needs to be renamed and consulted more often at a much more strategic level.

I already had them involved in developing a joint gender initiative for Aceh. The intent is to have gender competence and programming in place to help each UN agency active in post-tsunami Aceh to better mainstream gender. Our intent is also to give gender mainstreaming support to our government and non-government partners. Although this is very early thinking, I am hopeful that we can get similar inter-agency gender mainstreaming support in place in our other two geographic focus areas, namely Papua and Nusa Tenggara Timor (NTT).

What are the successes and lessons learned in using a GenCap Adviser in Indonesia?

I think the major success was engagement. The GenCap Adviser did three field analyses. By collecting cluster/sector-specific gender outcomes and insights from both the Aceh tsunami and Yogyakarta/Central Java earthquake responses, the GenCap Adviser was able to better engage cluster teams. Cluster-specific field examples focused attention and enriched dialogue. Cluster model learnings also resulted in a number of gender equality recommendations that were recently presented to the IASC in Geneva.

I am especially proud that Indonesia's UN, government and non-government humanitarian actors have agreed on a Rapid Needs Assessment for emergency response and that each cluster has contingency plans in place. Having a gender adviser in my team helped us to facilitate more gender responsiveness in both processes.

In addition, the GenCap Adviser worked with the UN team to map out more extensive gender analysis. Examples include exploring gender dynamics in Papua's cholera outbreak and in avian influenza. The

adviser also assisted me to launch a UN network of PSEA focal points for and kicked off their PSEA training.

Lessons learned:

- The HC/RC's office, as a driving force in the UN reform, is the best location for a UNCT gender adviser. Being part of the HC/RC team allows early identification of gender entry points and most timely assignment of gender expertise in both cluster mobilization and joint development initiatives. This also avoids agency turf tension and can facilitate a more inclusive, equitable involvement of agency gender specialists in inter-agency forums.
- A *One UN* approach will need to actively engage UN agency cross-cutting expertise (gender equality, human rights, avian flu and MDGs) in activities that flow through the cycle emergency-to-development cycle. Cross-cutting resources are needed to enhance coherence, efficiency and effectiveness in inter-agency collaboration. Ensuring gender responsiveness in disaster risk reduction and preparedness is an example of one important humanitarian-development interface in the UN planning process, particularly in Indonesia where "normal" development and crisis management and prevention have to come together.
- As an independent senior adviser, a GenCap Adviser can negotiate time-efficient openings for UN gender specialists to grow out of their agency enclaves and collectively strengthen the *One UN* inter-agency collaboration. As such, a GenCap Adviser can demonstrate the value of gender expertise positioned in the HC/RC office and be a useful bridge until sustainable gender expertise is acquired. A second six-month GenCap placement has been approved while UNCT Indonesia establishes ongoing gender support.

The **IASC Gender Standby Capacity (GenCap)** project seeks to build capacity of **humanitarian actors** at country level to mainstream gender equality programming, including prevention and response to gender-based violence and work on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, in all sectors of humanitarian response. GenCap Advisers work in inter-agency capacity and sit with RC/HCs. To find out more about how to request a GenCap Advisor contact gencap@un.org or visit www.humanitarianreform/gencap.

