

# Inclusion of Women in Emergency Shelter (ES) & Non-Food Items (NFI) Programming

November 2023 | Afghanistan

## KEY MESSAGES

- The reason for **women's involvement in shelter repair and construction** seemed to be related to economic necessity. However, in many FGDs (focus group discussions) participants reported an interest to be more involved which was hampered by stereotypes about **women's physical abilities as well as a lack of women-led trainings**.
- While the content of the **standard winter clothing and blanket kits** were reported to be **mostly relevant**, women from more than half of FGDs reported **needing a greater quantity of winter items**. Considering the long distances required to collect heating fuel, this **may provide much needed relief for families unable to travel long distances**.
- Women reported that ways to **resolve barriers** to their involvement in ES activities include **segregated technical training with female trainers**. Women also reported that ways to increase access to distribution sites and assistance involve **including women in distribution sites**. In addition, establishing **distribution sites closer to their settlements** would **relieve transportation costs and** mitigate the **need for a male guardian**.

## CONTEXT & RATIONALE

Following August 2021, there has been a shift in the situation of women, with increased restrictions on their participation in public life. Restrictions on women working and traveling outside of the home, and engagement of women in humanitarian activities, dramatically reduced women's ability to access safe, culturally sensitive, and lifesaving services.<sup>1</sup>

There is a risk that the needs of women will remain unmet without intentional efforts to identify and address them. Therefore, in coordination with the ES/NFI Cluster the Inclusion of Women in Shelter/NFI Programming assessment was conducted, recognizing that gender considerations must be integrated into ES/NFI planning and program design to ensure all people equally benefit and programs meet the needs on the ground.

In response to concerns of the possible complete exclusion of women from humanitarian response programming, the ES/NFI cluster, through this qualitative assessment, will identify essential household and personal items needed by a family during an emergency, winter and transitional shelter design concerns, and needs of women, as well as measure the extent to which their concerns are already reflected in ES/NFI assistance packages and standards. Doing so will support the cluster in developing evidence-based guidance for future shelter programmes to improve gender responsiveness.



## The Status of Women’s Participation in Shelter Repair and Construction

*Although women’s involvement in shelter repair and construction is limited, FGD participants reported being involved in various activities. The poor economic situation of households or lack of a male head were reported as the main drivers of their involvement, sometimes including the involvement of children.*

In the majority of FGDs (14/20), women reported being involved in shelter repair and construction. When participating in shelter and construction, FGD participants mostly reported providing assistance as unskilled workers to a male family member or spouse (10/20 FGDs). Other ways in which women are involved include designing the house blueprint and interior design (6/20 FGDs), or in selecting the land for construction (4/20 FGDs).

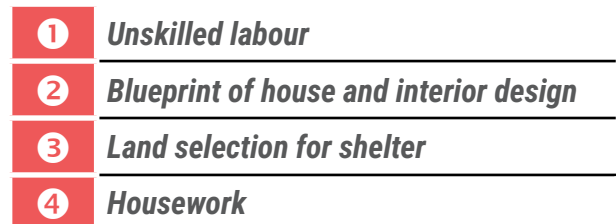
Participants from all FGDs reported that women support men in shelter repair and construction through housework, such as cooking, preparing water, and childcare. However, women who are also directly involved in repair and construction are still occupied with tasks at home, in effect doubling their workload.

Participants reported that their involvement in shelter repair and construction is often a result of a lack of income prohibiting both male and female-headed households to pay for labour (8/20 FGDs), or lack of a male workforce and male family members (2/20 FGDs). However, participants from one FGD reported that some women are involved in shelter repair and construction because they are interested.

Participants from FGDs who reported that skilled labour was used also reported that neither women nor children

are involved in shelter repair and construction. This further highlighted the economic dimension of women’s involvement which depends on the affordability and availability of labour, indicating that in case they could afford labour and it is available, women and children did not participate in shelter repair and construction. Women’s involvement is therefore often due neither to equitable social conditions nor complementary skills but because of economic challenges faced by households or households lacking a male family member.

**Figure 1: Women’s reported types of participation during shelter repair and construction**



**Figure 2: Women’s reported reasons for participating in shelter repair and construction**

Economic 💰	Social 👤
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of budget for labour</li> <li>Lack of male workforce</li> <li>Lack of skilled labour</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Women are interested in construction</li> <li>Men have other obligations</li> <li>No men in household</li> </ul>

*“Women are able to get involved in shelter construction. This is because the number of males are less in the houses or migrated abroad... instead of paying the labour wage, they would use that money to cover other requirements.”*

*“We cannot ask a stranger freely [about technical guidance] and even if we want information from anyone, they are not willing to give us information... But men do not face these problems.”*

## Challenges for Women Participation in ES/NFI Activities

*While women are involved to a limited extent in various aspects of ES/NFI activities, challenges exist that pertain to capacity building and trainings, as well as social norms. Despite these challenges, women expressed their interest in becoming more involved in ES/NFI activities.*

Despite that participants from most FGDs (15/20) reported that no skilled female workers exist in their nahiya, women were interested in being more involved in shelter repair and construction (14/20 FGDs). For those assessed districts in which skilled female workers exist, these women reported not having received any professional trainings. In only one district did participants report the existence of female engineers who sketch and design house plans.

Other challenges relate to social norms and the difficulty in overcoming these. Participants from some (8/20) FGDs reported that there are social problems relating to women or a perception that doing heavy work is difficult for women (5/20 FGDs). For example, a few participants from a few FGDs (4/20 FGDs) reported that men are freely able to provide for their family’s basic needs while women are not

because in order to go outside they need a male guardian (2/20 FGDs), conditions are unsafe for women (2/20 FGDs), and merchants are reluctant to provide information on items to women without a male guardian (3/20 FGDs). In addition, in one FGD, participants noted that they were uncomfortable discussing who they ask in their community if they have questions about shelter construction or repair.

The challenges faced by women in ES/NFI activities indicate a lack of training opportunities in many of the assessed districts, which is needed in order to increase the participation of women in shelter repair and construction. A lack of role models could also be a contributing factor to the marginal opportunities for women’s involvement. Additional challenges relate to social norms, which are prominent nationwide, requiring a focus on economic inequality and barriers to accessing basic services such as markets and transportation.

*“[Without a male guardian] women cannot go to the market freely and they also face problems with item prices in the market. For example, shopkeepers charge them high prices.”*

**Figure 3: Women’s reported top challenges to accessing ES/NFI activities**

- 1 **Gender stereotypes about women’s physical abilities and social interactions**
- 2 **Needing a male guardian to leave the house**
- 3 **Unsafe conditions when going outside alone**
- 4 **Housework in addition to shelter labour**

## FGDs Participants’ Recommendations for Improving their Inclusion in ES/NFI Activities and Assistance Distribution<sup>3</sup>

*Participants provided an array of recommendations for resolving challenges to their participation in ES/NFI activities and the distribution of assistance. They discussed ways to build their capacity in technical shelter repair and construction, accessing distribution sites, and selecting beneficiaries of assistance. Their recommendations involved greater inclusion of female staff to offset social barriers as well as economic challenges that are particular to women.*

Participants in almost all FGDs (19/20) reported that women from female-headed households are not equally comfortable in receiving technical guidance and trainings as compared to male-headed households, limiting their participation and skills in shelter repair and construction. In order to resolve limitations on technical guidance for women in general, participants suggested female instructors hold trainings in segregated sessions or to receive technical instruction from male family members.

(3/20) reported that organisations should coordinate female inclusion with relevant officials first.

Women reported that travelling long distances to distribution sites and the distribution process were barriers that particularly affect women. Participants from some FGDs (7/20) reported that means of transportation to distribution sites was a challenge for women due to transportation costs and the difficulty of locating the site. Because a male guardian is needed to travel, this incurs extra costs for those with a male guardian and prevents those without one from traveling long distances. In addition, during the distribution process, participants in some FGDs (5/20) reported that the distribution site was too crowded. Lack of female staff, lack of transparency, and irregularities in queueing were also reported by participants. To fit their specific needs, the participants in some FGDs (5/20) recommended involving women in distribution sites and establishing the site in close locations.

While many challenges reported by women are social in nature, participants tended to highlight and suggest practices that would align with social norms while offsetting inequalities, such as accommodating gender segregation in trainings and taking into account the cost or burden of needing a male guardian.

*“There are professional women but there are no possibilities of getting professional training... We would be very glad if we are provided the opportunities to stand on our feet and share the knowledge with others for a successful future.”*

Furthermore, equitable female beneficiary selection could be impacted by bias in assessments that are conducted primarily by male enumerators. Participants from almost all FGDs (17/20) reported that a household assessment is the best way of selecting beneficiaries of ES/NFI assistance, but participants from some FGDs reported that hiring female enumerators or involving local leaders is the best way for selecting beneficiaries. Participants from some FGDs (7/20) reported that partners should hire female staff and participants from a few (3/20) FGDs noted that they should be hired from the target area. Participants noted that surveys conducted by female enumerators would help to identify female beneficiaries. Few of the participants in few

**Figure 4: Top recommendations made by women to improve their inclusion in ES/NFI activities:**

- 1 **Segregated trainings with female trainers**
- 2 **Household assessments with female enumerators**
- 3 **Covering transportation costs to/from distribution sites**
- 4 **Hiring female staff at distribution sites**
- 5 **Closer distribution sites to settlements**

## FGDs Participants' Feedback on Improving Impact of ES/NFI Assistance

Participants reported that beneficiary selection, the standard winter kit, and transitional shelter design were mostly satisfactory with room for improvement. They recommended adding certain items to the kits and modifying shelter designs to accommodate seasonality and diverse household needs.

Most (15/20) of the FGDs included a mix of participants that had, or had not, participated in the ESNFI assistance distribution.

### Beneficiary Selection:

Beneficiary selection was reportedly conducted through various mechanisms. For example, participants from some groups (8/20) reported that beneficiaries were selected involving village representatives, which sometimes resulted in unfair selection through personal connections. Participants from some FGDs (10/20) also reported that beneficiaries are selected through village representatives or through organizational staff in coordination with local representatives. Participants from one FGD reported that selection is conducted by the ES/NFI cluster.

### Standard NFI Kit:<sup>8</sup>

In discussions about the standard NFI kit, participants in more than half of the FGDs (13/20) reported that all the items are in line with the needs of the households. However, participants reported that the items are less relevant or not sufficient (6/20 FGDs). According to participants from some FGDs (7/20), in case of emergency, the NFI kit reduces minimum needs while others reported that they are sufficient.

### Standard Winter Kit:<sup>9</sup>

In discussions about the standard winter kit, participants from more than half of FGDs (11/20) also reported that the

content of the kit is relevant to their family needs, while some (3/20) reported that they are not in line with the need of poor households. Participants in more than half of the FGDs (11/20) reported that the winter items are not enough, while participants from a few FGDs (6/20) reported that the content of winter items are adequate to some extent.

In addition to double-size blankets and heaters, a few participants in one FGD recommended adding food items. This request may possibly reflect concerns about the pre-harvest lean season in Afghanistan when food insecurity increases.<sup>4</sup>

### Transitional Shelter Design:<sup>5</sup>

Although participants from FGDs were happy with the ES/NFI transitional shelters, participants from more than half (15/20) noted that the spaces were too small, or it was not enough for big households and a few groups (5/20) reported that the number of doors and windows should be increased. It was also reported in one group to increase the thickness of walls to prevent cold weather in winter.<sup>6</sup>

When discussing room sizes and space, participants reported that the kitchen and internal rooms are too small: women reported that the kitchen has no room for equipment or cupboards; the design is too small for larger households for whom there should be more rooms.

Some women also recommended increasing the height for doors, construction of a storeroom for kitchen, and constructing the bathroom outside of the house.

Figure 5: Suggested additional Standard NFI Kit items reported by women

Wash Items 	Winter Items 	Kitchen Items 
Water jugs	Winter clothes	Glasses
Water heaters	Heating devices	Dishes
Dishwashing soap	Blankets	Teapots

Figure 6: Suggested additional Standard Winter Kit items reported by women

Clothing 	Other Food/NFI 
Jackets/coats	Double-size blankets
Winter hijabs <sup>7</sup>	Heaters
Shoes for older people	Food
Pants for men	

## METHODOLOGY OVERVIEW

This assessment was conducted 20 through FGDs, with 6-10 women each, across 10 provinces in Afghanistan to assess the inclusion of women in ES/NFI programming. The FGDs were conducted where the operational environment was safe to interview women and where it was culturally acceptable to discuss the role of women in shelter construction and repair, household decision-making, and ES/NFI programming. Participants in this assessment were from different population groups, including women in positions of community leadership. However, not all women included in these FGDs received assistance, nor had all participants ever lived in transitional shelters.

These interviews were conducted in person using a paper-based semi-structured questionnaire that had been developed after a desk review. The FGDs were conducted by female enumerators working in pairs: one moderator who led the conversation and one notetaker who noted all the discussion points from the interview.

Data was analysed using a Data Saturation Analysis Grid (DSAG) to organise the range of participant responses and the summary findings from the analysis were used to produce this brief. All findings are indicative.

The respondents of this assessment were women located in areas of the country where it is considered safe to interview women and culturally acceptable to discuss the role of women in shelter construction and repair, household decision-making, and ES/NFI programming. However, due to the conservative nature and lack of access to some rural areas of the country, the research team was unable to conduct FGDs with women in these areas. Additionally, among the women who participated, there were some who were reluctant to share their ideas openly.

## ENDNOTES

Page 1  
1 [Future in the Balance: Taking Action to Ensure Afghan Women's & Girls' Rights Under de-facto Rule](#). (RI, August 2022)

PAGE 2  
2 [Afghanistan Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group. Afghanistan Inter-Agency Rapid Gender Analysis](#). (GiHA Working Group in Afghanistan. 2022)

PAGE 3  
3 Not all FGD participants received assistance or passed through a transitional shelter.

4 [Integrated Food Security Phase Classification](#). IPC Acute Food Insecurity Analysis (October 2023 - March 2024).

5 [Afghanistan Shelter Cluster. Guidelines for Transitional Shelter Support](#) (2022): According to the Afghanistan Shelter Cluster, "transitional shelter is an incremental process which supports the shelter of families affected by conflicts and disasters, as they seek to maintain alternative options for their recovery. Through its five characteristics, transitional shelter can be:

- Upgraded into part of a permanent house;
- Reused for another purpose;
- Relocated from a temporary site to a permanent location;
- Resold, to generate income to aid with recovery"
- Recycled for reconstruction.

6 [Afghanistan weather condition](#) (worlddata.info past 20 years).

7 Hijab: Hijab is referred to the garment worn by women to cover their hair, face and body.

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**8 Standard NFI Kit:**

- Hammer
- Nails
- Shovel ( with handle )
- Tarpaulin
- Pcv foil
- Woven materials (rope)
- Pick axe ( without Handle)
- Pliers with wire cutter
- Thick working gloves
- Plastering trowel
- Water level tool
- Packing bag
- Hand-held saw
- Wooden board
- For roofing
- Wooden pole
- Wooven materials
- Empty sandbag
- Steel pan Wheelbarrow
- Carpet

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**9 Standard Winter Kit:**

- Children sweater
- Male winter wrap
- Woman winter shawl
- Warm winter socks
- Children woolen winter gloves
- Warm winter woolen children cap
- Adult sweater
- Adult winter shoes
- Children boots