



# Unheard Unseen

**Marginalised women in fragile  
and conflict-affected states**

A Global Agenda for Action  
for 2020 and Beyond



WOMEN *for* WOMEN  
International

In support of:



# Unheard Unseen

## **Women for Women International's Global Agenda for Action for 2020 and beyond.**

**"I want women to change, let it be known that women are also capable of doing things. Women should know their rights and understand that they are an integral part of the society. A woman has the right to become a governor; she has the right to become a president; she has the right to speak up. A woman has that right."**

*Hannatu, Riyom, Nigeria*

Gender equality and women's rights have never received so much attention. In 2020, the world is reflecting on how far we have come to deliver on our promises, and we are thinking critically about what is needed to truly make gender equality a reality for ALL women.

At Women for Women International we know that marginalised women affected by conflict, who are the poorest and most socially excluded, continue to experience discrimination and violence. They are the hardest to reach, which means no one is reaching out and offering them an opportunity to speak up. The women we work with are unheard and unseen; despite the commitments under the UN's Global Goals, they are being left behind.

### **We have identified five priority areas which form our Agenda for Action.**

Read on for an outline of why this is important and how we want to create space for marginalised women in conflict affected countries to tell their stories and influence change.

This Agenda for Action will set the direction for our advocacy work. Our full report provides analysis and specific details on five priority areas to achieve the policy changes that are needed for marginalised women affected by conflict.

**You can find our full report on our website  
[womenforwomen.org.uk/agendaforaction](https://womenforwomen.org.uk/agendaforaction).**

## The world today for marginalised women.

The world is changing and with unprecedented levels of fragility and conflict, women are faced with more challenges than ever.

- An estimated 264 million women are living in fragile and conflict affected countries. *(Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, 2019)*
- Marginalised women living in extreme poverty have less than \$1.90 a day to live on, with many living far below that threshold. *(The international extreme poverty line is set by the World Bank)*
- 71 million people have been forcibly displaced worldwide (the largest number ever recorded) and half of those are women. *(UNHCR, 2018)*
- More than 70% of women in crisis settings have experienced violence. *(Action Aid, 2016)*
- In 2019, none of the peace agreements reached in UN-led initiatives included provisions for women. *(UN Women, 2019)*



**“After the programme, I know that I am a human being and have the same rights like the men in the family and community and I can be free. I have the right to choose, I have rights for work and property and when I advocate for others, I try my best to help women solve their problems.”**

*Lutfia, Kapisa, Afghanistan*

# Action Area 1

## Make women visible.

**“The change I would love to see is girl child education. Let our children become presidents. I would be proud to see that our daughters have become the local government chairperson and another, the president. Our hope is for women to move forward in the nation and not to be left behind.”**

*Lydia, Jos East, Nigeria*



Photo: © Serrah Galos

### Problem

Women have different experiences, but policy makers often treat them as one group, neglecting the unique realities of the most marginalised women. This means their specific needs are invisible and unaccounted for in key global policy agendas. The UN’s Global Goals (also referred to as the Sustainable Development Goals), for example, largely fail to explicitly mention marginalised women. Data collected and used to measure progress of the goals does not go beyond national and top line averages. They do not include information on the hardest to reach and marginalised groups, including women.

### Recommendation

Policy makers must focus explicitly on the needs of the most marginalised women, use disaggregated data that includes the hardest to reach individuals and include unofficial information from organisations working with marginalised women.

### Our Approach

Women for Women International’s data shows the realities for women affected by conflict. In support of the implementation of the Global Goals we monitor our contribution towards them and share our progress against specific Goals. In Afghanistan in 2018, for example, 17% of women graduates from our programme reported earning over \$1.90 a day (the international poverty line), compared to only 5% at enrolment (Goal 1). In 2018 in Nigeria, our graduation data showed a 105% increase in test results that measure women’s self-confidence (Goal 5).



## Action Area 2

## Increase coordination to address women's realities.

**"My hope for the next 5 years is that women would be able to talk to whoever it is and not be intimidated and in government too, we would want women to occupy decision-making positions."**

*Nankyer, Pankshin, Nigeria*



Photo: © Alison Baskerville

### Problem

Conflict affects every aspect of women's lives. Harmful social norms are rooted in patriarchal systems that exist in all societies and form barriers to women's power. They may be exacerbated by conflict but they exist before, during and afterwards.

The work of the international community is uncoordinated between the humanitarian, development and peacebuilding sectors. This approach does not reflect the real, interconnected experiences and needs of marginalised women, which are not broken into artificial categories, e.g. 'emergency response' or 'long-term development'.

### Recommendation

The humanitarian, development and peacebuilding sectors need more coordination and a strong gender focus. In order to reflect marginalised women's true experiences, which are primarily influenced by patriarchal systems and their harmful social and gender norms, the different sectors need to work more closely together.

### Our Approach

Women for Women International's work cuts across the humanitarian, development and peacekeeping sectors. We have established ourselves as a convener of organisations across sectors and we aim to create a dialogue about how to improve coordination and ensure there is always a gender-focused approach. By doing so, we are helping to ensure a joined-up strategy that works for the most marginalised women.

# Action Area 3

## Listen to women.

**“During the Change Agent programme, I learnt many subjects about women’s rights, violence against women, advocacy [and] problem analysis at the community level. We now have an action plan that we made based on women problem analysis, and for implementation of it we had several advocacy meetings with high officials. After communicating with them, we were able to solve mine and other women’s problems.”**

*Maliha, Kapisa, Afghanistan*



Photo: © Esther Nsapu

### Problem

People in power are not listening to the voices of marginalised women. Despite grand political gestures, women continue to face barriers to their participation in decisions that have a direct impact on their lives.

Government commitments and initiatives will not succeed if marginalised women’s voices are not invited to the table and listened to when they get there.

### Recommendation

There are multiple barriers that prevent women and local women’s organisations from accessing decision-making spaces, including the obvious lack of funding. Women are key influencers of change and their participation in processes such as peace agreements is vital. Women’s voices are needed at all levels of decision-making, from the household to international frameworks.

### Our Approach

Through our Change Agents programme, we provide women with advocacy and leadership training. With these skills, Change Agents form networks and work together to identify problems and barriers in their community and advocate for change.



## Action Area 4

# Prioritise ending violence against women.

**“There has been a change in the way the community addresses rape. My neighbour’s daughter was raped and people said we should let it go due to the stigma she will face when she grows up; no one will marry her. The case was hushed away. After we got this training, there was another girl, a 4-year-old was raped by a 35-year-old. We went and saw her, we took her to the maternity, they quickly took samples and evidence. Then he was arrested. We supported the parents and encouraged them through the legal proceedings. He has been sentenced to 23 years in prison.”**

*Maryam, Jos East, Nigeria*



Photo: © Ryan Carter

### Problem

Violence against women is a fundamental barrier to women’s power and rights. Women’s vulnerability to all forms of violence increases during conflict but is caused by harmful gender norms which existed before conflict. Despite this, international interventions do not prioritise addressing the deep-rooted causes of violence against women.

### Recommendation

Tackling violence against women requires community level change through long-term, holistic and integrated approaches. It is vital to shift attitudes, behaviours and norms in order to tackle the structural causes of violence. Women’s needs must be at the centre of this work.

### Our Approach

Women for Women International works with survivors of violence, supporting them to rebuild all aspects of their lives. Our social and economic empowerment curriculum includes a focus on the root causes of violence; women learn about how societal and cultural traditions contribute to violence and how to identify different forms of violence against women.

We also work to address social norms through our Men’s Engagement Programme which provides training for male leaders and community members on women’s empowerment and challenges harmful attitudes and behaviours.



## Action Area 5

## Invest in women's economic power.

**"In the past in my village, women were denied their inheritance but now we have spoken up. In my family, my mother has three daughters and when the inheritance was shared, none was given to us but later, after I spoke to them, they gave us some part of the inheritance. There are others too who didn't used to give women any share of inheritance but now they have started to."**

*Lydia, Jos East, Nigeria*



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### Problem

Poverty affects women more than men, and the majority of the world's poorest women live in countries affected by conflict. Marginalised women are faced with chronic poverty and structural barriers which prevent them from fulfilling their economic potential. But there is not enough priority and funding given to women's economic power in fragile and conflict-affected countries.

### Recommendation

Women's economic power has the potential to transform women's lives and their communities. For marginalised women to be able to lift themselves out of poverty sustainably, the international community must take a holistic and integrated approach that supports women's social and economic power and work within communities to shift barriers and stereotypes.

### Our Approach

Women for Women International invests in ultra-poor and marginalised women to build the skills, tools and resources they need to transform their own lives and communities.

This approach emphasises both social empowerment to help women overcome barriers to inclusion, and economic empowerment to increase food security, income, savings, and resilience to economic shocks.

## What we are asking from the global community.

In order to address these priorities, the international community should:

- Include and prioritise the needs of marginalised women in conflict and fragile situations to ensure that they are no longer left behind in the delivery of global commitments.
- Increase partnerships and collaboration across different sectors and put women's rights and gender equality at the centre of all responses.
- Ensure that women's voices are heard at all levels of decision-making through their participation in all decisions that impact their lives.
- Make preventing all forms of violence against women an urgent priority, including through funding.
- Commit to investing in the economic power of marginalised women.

In our Agenda for Action full report, we have identified specific ways in which the international community should implement these recommendations.

Find the report at

[womenforwomen.org.uk/  
agendaforaction](https://womenforwomen.org.uk/agendaforaction)

## Our commitments to achieving the agenda for action.

To support the international community, Women for Women International makes the following commitments:

- We will **highlight the reality for marginalised women** and ensure that their specific needs are included and recognised in decision-making processes. We will continue to ensure that we are able to support the most marginalised women by piloting approaches that meet the needs of specific groups of women, including women with disabilities, displaced women and adolescent girls playing the roles of women (as mothers or wives).
- We will **build partnerships and bring together influential partners** from the humanitarian, development and peacebuilding sectors to champion more coordination and collaboration towards delivering an agenda that works for the most marginalised women.
- We will **strengthen the participation of women** we work with in our programmes and support their participation in decision-making spaces. We will do this by stepping up our funding and innovation of our Change Agents Programme that supports women in advocating for and influencing change in their communities.
- We will **continue our advocacy on violence against women** to raise awareness of the specific challenges faced by marginalised women. We will also strengthen our programmatic work on the prevention and response to violence against women, including through our Men's Engagement Programme.
- We will **increase our investment in women's power** to address the structural barriers that impact women's decision-making power and access to livelihood opportunities.

## Join Our Movement.

Women for Women International is committed to reach at least one million women by 2030.

### To do this, we need your support:

- **Help us** to support thousands more women through our year-long training programme, breaking the isolation of war and creating opportunities for sustainable change.
- **Partner with us** to fund the training of hundreds more Change Agents who will use their skills and local knowledge to advocate within their communities on the challenges that affect them most.
- **Fund us** to train men in countries affected by conflict as allies for women's empowerment through our Men's Engagement Programme.

From sponsoring one woman to supporting our community based advocacy work or Men's Engagement Programme, we will work with you to develop a range of partnership options based on your level of support.

Please get in touch with Julia Hopper, Director, Programme Funding & Partnerships

[jhopper@womenforwomen.org](mailto:jhopper@womenforwomen.org)

## Further Reading.

Key agendas and frameworks that affect marginalised women in conflict and fragile settings.

- The **Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action** is a visionary agenda that remains today the most comprehensive framework for women's empowerment and realising the human rights of women and girls everywhere.
- The **UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)** is an international treaty that focuses on the equality of women and men in all areas of life. The convention has been ratified by 189 states who therefore have an obligation to respect, protect and fulfil women's human rights.
- **United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325** marked the first time that the Security Council recognised the disproportionate and unique impact that conflict has on women. As the first resolution to be adopted in the **Women, Peace and Security agenda**, it recognises the importance of women's participation in all aspects of peace and security including prevention, conflict resolution and peacebuilding.
- The **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) or Global Goals** are a set of goals to achieve peace and prosperity for all by 2030. The Goals were adopted by all UN Member States and are underpinned by a commitment to Leave No One Behind.

"I want the next generation of women to not have the fear and shyness that I had and they have the opportunity to do better than we have, to know their rights."

*Justine, Luchhiga, DRC*

## Get in touch

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