



**LUNDS**  
UNIVERSITET

# Gender Equality, Development and Effective Humanitarian Aid

A study of UNHCR's gender policy from a  
Human Rights perspective



Human Rights Studies  
Historical Institute  
Miranda Lann  
MRSK62  
Semester: Spring 2020  
Tutor: Lina Sturfeldt  
No. of words: 13 743

## Abstract

Armed conflict displaces a large number of people every year. Today, over 60 million people are estimated to have been forced from their homes because of circumstances beyond their control. Organizations such as UNHCR work to create sanctuaries for them to have their basic needs satisfied. During the years, the focus has expanded and steered towards providing refugees with developmental training and education, preparing them to build up societies if and when possible to return to their homes. Today, one of the major goals for UNHCR is to educate refugees on gender equality and provide women and girls with better opportunities. The purpose of this study is to examine how UNHCR perceives gender roles, and how this might affect the results of their work towards gender equality in the long run. The following question where therefore posed: How does UNHCR's approach on how to reach gender equality have the possibility to create a permanent change in accordance with Brooke A. Ackerly's theory on human rights? With ideology criticism as a method, two official documents from UNHCR were analyzed with a theoretical framework by Ackerly. The findings indicate that UNHCR somewhat have the ability to create a permanent change, even though it was suggested that improvements should be made especially in the area of listening.

**Keywords:** *Gender; Humanitarian aid; Refugees; Development; Women's rights; UNHCR*

# Jämställdhet, Utveckling och Effektiva Humanitära Bistånd

En studie om UNHCRs genus policy från ett  
människorättsperspektiv

## Abstract (Swedish)

Väpnade konflikter tvingar ett stort antal människor på flykt varje år. Över 60 miljoner människor beräknas vara på flykt idag på grund av omständigheter utom deras kontroll. Organisationer såsom UNHCR arbetar med att skapa fristäder dit flyktingar kan ta vägen och få sina grundläggande behov tillgodosedda. Under åren har ett större fokus lagts på att erbjuda utbildning och information som ska förbereda dem för att kunna återuppbygga sina samhällen om och när möjligheten att återvända hem uppstår. Idag är ett av UNHCR:s stora mål att utbilda flyktingar inom jämställdhet för att på så vis förbättra situationen, framförallt för kvinnor och flickor. Syftet med denna studie var att undersöka hur UNHCR uppfattar könsroller och hur detta påverkar deras arbete mot jämställdhet mellan könen i längden. Studien ställer därför följande fråga: På vilket sätt har UNHCR:s tillvägagångssätt att arbeta för jämställdhet mellan könen möjlighet att skapa en permanent förändring i enighet med Brooke A. Ackerlys teori om mänskliga rättigheter? Med hjälp av ideologikritik som metod analyserades två officiella dokument från UNHCR utifrån ett teoretiskt ramverk av Ackerly. Resultaten visade att sättet som UNHCR arbetar med jämställdhet mellan könen och till viss del har möjlighet att skapa en permanent förändring, trots att det även föreslogs att förbättringar bör ske framförallt inom UNHCR:s förmåga att lyssna.

**Nyckelord:** *Genus; Humanitärt bistånd; Flyktingar; Utveckling; Kvinnors rättigheter; UNHCR*

# Table of contents

Abstract.....	2
Abstract (Swedish).....	3
Abbreviations.....	6
1 Introduction.....	7
1.2 Purpose and research question.....	8
1.3 Definitions .....	9
1.4 Material.....	11
1.4.1 UNHCR Policy on Age, Gender, and Diversity .....	11
1.4.2 UNHCR Review of Gender Inequality in Operations .....	11
2 Previous research .....	14
3 Theory: The Immanent Universal Theory of Human Rights.....	18
4 Method: Ideology criticism.....	22
5 Analysis .....	25
5.1 Step 1 .....	25
5.1.1 UNHCR and refugee women .....	25
5.1.1.1 How is the relation between the groups described? .....	25
5.1.1.2 How is this relation valued? .....	27
5.1.1.3 How are the groups supposed to act according to how their relation is valued? .....	28
5.1.2 UNHCR and refugee men .....	29
5.1.2.1 How is the relation between the groups described? .....	29
5.1.2.2 How is this relation valued? .....	31
5.1.2.3 How are the groups supposed to act according to how their relation is valued? .....	31
5.1.3 Refugee women and refugee men .....	33
5.1.3.1 How are relations between different groups described?.....	33
5.1.3.2 How are these relations valued? .....	34
5.1.3.3 How are the groups supposed to act according to how their relations are valued? .....	35

5.2	Step 2 .....	37
5.2.1	In what reality is the document produced, who is the intended reader and who is the producer? .....	37
5.2.2	How does this affect the results from the previous questions?.....	38
5.3	Step 3 - Theoretical connections .....	39
6	Discussion.....	45
7	Conclusion .....	49
	References.....	51

## Abbreviations

**UNHCR** - United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

**AGD Approach** - Age, Gender, and Diversity Approach

**SGBV** - Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

# 1 Introduction

Humanitarian aid has gone from a perceived obligation to assist refugees who have fled from any source of humanitarian displacement, like conflict or natural disaster with the basic needs required to survive, to a work that have more frequently included education in for example sustainable development. The added focus aims to make refugees more self-reliant, independent, and ready to return to normal life when the situation has stabilized, and returning home is possible.<sup>1</sup> The line separating the process of development and emergency relief has thus been blurred, and an organization working with emergency relief can now also have more long term goals that require a focus on development-oriented work. This work has also become more and more focused on issues concerning women's rights and working towards gender equality have become a common sight in international treaties.<sup>2</sup> But the presence of these humanitarian organizations in refugee camps, even though they provide lifesaving aid, can also cause conflict.<sup>3</sup>

These conflicts stem from the fact that when two cultures that in one way or another contravene each other need to cooperate, the result is often tension between the groups. In the case of a refugee camp, the culture of the organization in place tends to take the upper hand. After all, they are the ones providing aid that could mean the difference between life and death. It is therefore often in the refugee's interest to have a good relationship to the organization in place. But in some cases, refugees might turn their back on the organization if they feel that their culture is threatened.<sup>4</sup> Conflicts between aid organizations and refugees cause the efficiency of the organizations to decrease. Conflicts are therefore something that humanitarian aid organizations try to avoid in order to keep the efficiency high and reach out to more people in need of aid. Therefore, it is important for organizations to take culture into account when

---

<sup>1</sup> Crisp, Jeffery. Mind the Gap! UNHCR, Humanitarian Assistance and the Development Process. *The International Migration Review*. Vol. 35. No. 1. Special Issue: UNHCR at 50: Past, Present and Future of Refugee Assistance. 2001. p. 168; UNHCR. A new deal for refugees. UNHCR. [website] <https://www.unhcr.org/a-new-deal-for-refugees.html?query=self%20reliant> (accessible 2020-05-22).

<sup>2</sup> Olivius Elisabeth. Constructing Humanitarian Selves and Refugee Others. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*. Vol. 18. No. 2. 2016. p. 271.

<sup>3</sup> Ngo, Bic; Hansen, Sarah. Constructing Identities in UN Refugee Camps: The Politics of Language, Culture and Humanitarian Assistance. *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies*. No. 10, Vol. 2. 2013. p. 117.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p. 117.

they are planning their work.<sup>5</sup> Efficient humanitarian aid is of course desirable. It allows for more people to benefit from the presence of the aid organization, and therefore also reflects the ‘success’ of the operation in place.

This brings us over to gender issues and the topic of this study. The work with gender inequalities, and in particular the work with women’s participation, has been argued by researchers to be used by for example the UNHCR as a way to increase their efficiency rather than to improve the rights for women.<sup>6</sup> This paper examines two recent documents by UNHCR utilizing a critical ideological analysis as a method in order to illuminate how different groups are portrayed and how the organization plans to increase gender equality in refugee camps and communities. The study then goes on to a discussion connecting the results from the analysis together with previous research. The study concludes that in theory, UNHCR’s approach to reach gender equality seems to go well with Brook A. Ackerly’s theory on human rights. If UNHCR’s approach to encourage gender equality were to be followed, there is a real chance for UNHCR to be able to create a lasting change.

## 1.2 Purpose and research question

The purpose of this study is to examine UNHCR’s perception of gender roles and ways of working towards gender equality and see whether these show signs of creating a permanent change in refugee communities in accordance to Ackerly’s theory. Three of Ackerly’s main points will be used in order to do this. First being the feminist term ‘curb cutting’, which targets the importance of involving women when describing issues to pinpoint where human rights fail them, and as a result improve human rights for people in general. The second term being the ‘terrain of continued dispute’, which means to be attentive to what is portrayed as an issue which will highlight power dynamics that can lead us to see injustices that are still invisible. Thirdly, the term ‘courageous listening’ will be used, which describes the importance of

---

<sup>5</sup> Juan, Rodon N; Maria Serrano, Josep F; Cristina Giménez. Managing cultural conflicts for effective humanitarian aid. *Int. J. Production Economics*. Vol. 139. 2012. p. 375.

<sup>6</sup> Olivius. *Constructing Humanitarian Selves and Refugee Others*. p. 272.



listening in a way that allows you to actually understand an issue from both sides of a conflict in order to find a sustainable solution.

Two documents created by UNHCR where gender inequalities are discussed, as well as how they set out to deal with these inequalities, will be examined. The relation between UNHCR and refugees will be examined in correlation to how gender is understood as a problem and as a solution to issues and lead to a discussion on power hierarchies and gender equality from a human rights perspective. The research questions that the study aim to answer is as following:

- 1. How does UNHCR's approach on how to reach gender equality have the possibility to create a permanent change in accordance with Ackerly's theory on human rights?*

This study aims to ultimately broaden the understanding of how gender is understood in recent UNHCR documents. By connecting this to existing research the study aims to add a new perspective on how UNHCR:s approach to reach gender equality in refugee communities last in the long run. There is, of course, a lot of research concerning gender and humanitarian aid in refugee camp settings but concerning how gender is constructed and perceived in the eyes of UNHCR, there is less literature to find.<sup>7</sup>

### 1.3 Definitions

This section is intended to clarify some of the major terms used in this study and explain how they are used in this specific context. When the terms are used from this point and forward, this section aims to clarify in which way they are to be interpreted. Each one of these terms is widely discussed as to how they should be defined, and this section sets out to clarify how the terms are utilized in this study.

---

<sup>7</sup> Ngo. Hansen. Constructing Identities in UN Refugee Camps: The Politics of Language, Culture and Humanitarian Assistance. p. 98.

The term “culture” is used in this study, in accordance with Rodon, Serrano, and Giménez, who states that “culture is constantly produced and reproduced in social relations”<sup>8</sup>. Culture is a set of “ideas, customs, and social behavior of a particular people or society”<sup>9</sup>, according to the Oxford dictionary. Culture is hence seen as something that changes over time and space and is affected by its surroundings. In this study we will mainly be looking into the culture of UNHCR, by examining their ideas on how people should and should not act in society.

Gender is a starting point in this study, and it is therefore important to have defined how the term is used in this study. According to how UNHCR uses the term gender, it is also seen as something that can be changed and adjusted. How gender is understood at a certain time and place, is always in relation to a specific culture. Hence, gender roles adapt to cultural norms and expectations. Gender equality is seen nearly as a utopia or a goal for any society. Gender equality is a state where you as an individual are treated by people in your social life as well as by your environment the same way whether you are a man or a woman. The lack of gender equality usually mainly affects women negatively, at least in today’s society as well as throughout history, where she would get fewer opportunities and be treated in a lesser way, based on her gender.<sup>10</sup>

The term “humanitarian aid” will be used to explain UNHCR’s work in refugee camps as a whole, including both emergency relief and development programs. The term “emergency relief” will refer to the aid provided by UNHCR that includes the most basic things that are needed to stay alive, for example, food, clothes, shelter, etc. The term “development programs” will refer to any engagement within humanitarian aid where the goal is development, hence anything that is not strictly emergency relief, but connected to developing and adjusting something in a community. In the documents analyzed the development programs will mainly refer to the work towards gender equality.

---

<sup>8</sup> Rodon; Serrano; Giménez. Managing cultural conflicts for effective humanitarian aid. p. 368.

<sup>9</sup> Oxford dictionary. [website]. <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/culture> (accessible 2020-05-22).

<sup>10</sup> UNHCR. Inter-Agency Standing Committee. *Gender Handbook in Humanitarian Action*. December 2006. <https://www.unhcr.org/protection/women/50f91c999/iasc-gender-handbook-humanitarian-action.html?query=gender>. p. 1. (Accessible 2020-05-22).

## 1.4 Material

The primary material used in this study is two documents from UNHCR. Both documents are created to guide how UNHCR work towards gender equality with refugees. I will start by simply introducing the documents and going over the main topics and themes they both cover individually and wrap up with what both documents cover before moving forward to discussing the chosen theory for this study.

### 1.4.1 UNHCR Policy on Age, Gender, and Diversity

The first document is published in 2018. This document is the policy covering how UNHCR staff is anticipated to work with questions concerning age, gender, and diversity in all aspects of the organization. It covers UNHCR's core actions in several areas of engagement, and present how the AGD approach is to be incorporated into the organizations operations.<sup>11</sup> Since this document is a policy it is mandatory for the UNHCR staff to follow the statements laid out in the document when on duty. This document partially builds on results from the review document presented below and contains UNHCR's updated commitments towards women and girls.<sup>12</sup>

### 1.4.2 UNHCR Review of Gender Inequality in Operations

This document is a review of the organizations work done in 2016 and has hence steered the way for the policy presented above. This document includes an overview of how UNHCR has worked with gender inequality in operations in 2016, including recommendations for the following years, and what needs and challenges that have presented themselves. The review document is created with information gathered from a "survey of 55 UNHCR field operations,

---

<sup>11</sup> UNHCR. *Policy and Age, Gender and Diversity*. 2018.  
<https://www.unhcr.org/protection/women/5aa13c0c7/policy-age-gender-diversity-accountability-2018.html?query=policy%20gender> (accessible 2020-05-22).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. p. 6.

as well as interviews with key informants in 15 countries, four field missions”, as well as dialogues with over 1000 refugees.<sup>13</sup>

Both documents are for “general distribution”<sup>14</sup> but clearly created mainly as documents intended for UNHCR employees and donors. The review has in a way affected what the policy document put focus on, and the policy document in turn, affects how UNHCR staff is intended to act. It is, therefore, documents that are well suited to be examined in relation to how gender is understood by the organization. I argue that even though two different documents are used as a primary material in this study, they can be interpreted together. The documents are both created by UNHCR about their work on gender inequalities in refugee camps and are created in quite close proximity to each other, as there are created only two years apart. I believe that UNHCR has not changed drastically in the way they talk about gender during these two years and therefore argue that both can be used as one entity.

There are some reflections worth mentioning . First off, the documents that are intended to be analyzed are both official documents from UNHCR, and often portray themselves in a good light. It can hence be hard to see flaws in the organization whilst looking at the document without any possibility to cross-check with how the statements live up to reality. Utilizing the Review document which does include some interviews can therefore act as a way to balance this out, although this of course is no guarantee. Another thing that might be criticized is the fact that there is a fine line between discussing actual issues, such as the fact that women have fewer opportunities compared to men, and portraying refugee women as weak. It can be argued that my intentions are to find flaws with the documents and therefore criticizing UNHCR for doing the necessary act of identifying issues with gender inequality in order to promote a change. These are not the intentions of this study.

All in all, the documents do provide a broad view of UNHCR’s perception of gender inequality in refugee communities and therefore is a good fit for the aim of this study. The review document examines the past work that has been done and lays forward needs and areas

---

<sup>13</sup> UNHCR. *UNHCR Review of Gender Equality in Operations*. 2016.  
<https://www.unhcr.org/protection/women/57f3b9a74/unhcr-review-gender-equality-operations-2016.html?query=policy%20gender> (accessible 2019-06-03). p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> UNHCR. Policy and Age, Gender and Diversity; UNHCR. *UNHCR Review of Gender Equality in Operations*.

of development in UNHCR's gender work, whilst the policy document is looking into the future and builds upon the previous work. The way the documents portray refugees and gender inequality is therefore based on several years of work which is why I argue that the documents provide a solid material to analyze in this specific context.

I argue that these documents can say something about UNHCR's attitude towards the issue and also about their expectations on their staff. Even though the study is not cross referenced with how camps are run in reality, this study must initially assume that things are handled the way presented in these documents. The conclusions in this study is hence based on this which will only provide an initial suggestion as to how UNHCR's approach to gender equality is presented in the documents, and further research is required to get a fuller picture. I argue that this study still brings additional insights on the topic and can act as a guide for where to target further development in the area of gender equality in humanitarian work.

## 2 Previous research

There is a lot of literature concerning humanitarian aid, both in general and specifically concerning aid in refugee camps, as well as with a focus on gender aspects. Under this section, I will only cover a small part of the research available on the topic, in order to keep a focus on the ones more relevant to this study.

The first topic is a more general one on gender issues in refugee camps. One of the more prominent researchers that discusses this issue is Elisabeth Olivius. Olivius argues that gender equality sometimes is promoted in order to reach more efficient aid, rather than with the intention to create equality between the genders.<sup>15</sup> Olivius also argues that gender equality is used as a way to make refugees less dependent on humanitarian organizations.<sup>16</sup> This argument is also discussed by Jennifer Hyndman. She focuses more on humanitarian aid as a whole but has also done research on the subject with a gender perspective. She argues that gender inequalities appear in various ways in different cultures, and therefore UNHCR needs to become better at adapting their work to the place they are operating in.<sup>17</sup>

This brings us over to another aspect of the humanitarian aid in refugee camps alongside that of gender; culture. I believe bringing in the aspect of culture is relevant since it is a big part of how humanitarian assistance and refugee populations will interact. Hyndman argues that UNHCR needs to take into account the culture of the refugee population as well as the local culture, in order to successfully implement their assistance.<sup>18</sup> This is also something that the researchers Bic Ngo & Sarah Hansen discusses in their article. In similarity, they also examine how gender is understood and how culture comes into account pertaining refugee aid conducted by the UNHCR. However, they differ from this study by focusing on UNHCR field directors and officers rather than policy documents. They have a smaller focus on gender, and

---

<sup>15</sup> Olivius, Elisabeth. Refugee men as Perpetrators, Allies, or Troublemakers? Emerging Discourses in Men and Masculinities in Humanitarian Aid. *Women's Studies International Forum*. Vol. 56. 2016. p. 56.

<sup>16</sup> Olivius, Elisabeth. (Un)Governable Subjects: The Limits of Refugee Participation in the Promotion of Gender Equality in Humanitarian Aid. *Journal of Refugee Studies*. Vol. 27, No. 1. 2013. p. 57.

<sup>17</sup> Hyndman, Jennifer. Refugee Camps as Conflict Zones: The Politics of Gender. In Giles, Wenona & Hyndman, Jennifer (eds.). *Sites of Violence: Gender and Conflict Zones*. University of California Press. Los Angeles. 2004. p. 209.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. p. 209.

a bigger focus on language and representations of refugees as a group in itself. They conclude that UNHCR set up positive images for themselves and negative images for refugees<sup>19</sup>, which result in situations that allow for “degradation despite intentions to provide humanitarian assistance”<sup>20</sup>.

Furthermore, Ngo & Hansen come to the conclusion that UNHCR is sensitive to culture as long as it does not go against any human rights and that this results in re-establishing power relations.<sup>21</sup> This view is also shared with Hyndman who argues that UNHCR has a “framework that accommodates but does not engage gender and cultural dimensions. Differences are acceptable as far as they can be adapted within the existing masterplan.”<sup>22</sup> This issue is discussed by a majority of the researchers brought forward in this study.<sup>23</sup> Some of them also argue that refugees might comply with aid organizations, follow their demands and act as if they are adopting a gender-equal approach without actually doing so. Researchers argue that this leads to organizations celebrating success, without having accomplished a change.<sup>24</sup>

Juan, Rodon N, Josep F Maria Serrano, and Cristina Giménez also discuss some of these issues. They have a bigger focus on conflicts that arise between humanitarian aid providers and receivers, in our case UNHCR and refugees, and how organizations tend to solve cultural conflicts.<sup>25</sup> They discuss whether organizations tend to aspire towards being as

---

<sup>19</sup> Ngo; Hansen. *Constructing Identities in UN Refugee Camps: The Politics of Language, Culture and Humanitarian Assistance*. p. 98.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* p. 100.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* p. 117.

<sup>22</sup> Hyndman. *Sites of Violence: Gender and Conflict Zones*. p. 208.

<sup>23</sup> Olivius. (Un)Governable Subjects: The Limits of Refugee Participation in the Promotion of Gender Equality in Humanitarian Aid. p. 43; Hyndman. *Sites of Violence: Gender and Conflict Zones*. p. 200; Rodon; Serrano; Giménez. *Managing cultural conflicts for effective humanitarian aid*. p. 375; Audet, François. “From Disaster Relief to Development Assistance: Why Simple Solutions Don't Work.” *International Journal*, vol. 70, no. 1. 2015. p. 111.

<sup>24</sup> Grabska, Katarzyna. *Constructing Modern Gendered Civilized Women and Men: Gender-Mainstreaming in Refugee Camps*. *Gender and Development*. Routledge Publishing. Vol. 19. No.1. 2011. p. 88-91; Freedman, Jane. A. *Gendered Protection for the ‘Victims’ of war: Mainstreaming Gender in Refugee Protection*. In *Making Gender, Making War: Violence, Military and Peacekeeping Practices*, Kronsell, Annica (ed); Svedberg, Erika (ed). Routledge. New York. 2012. p. 126-128; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, Elena. ” Ideal” Refugee Women and Gender Equality Mainstreaming in the Saharawi Refugee Camps: “Good Practice” For Whom? *Refugee Survey Quarterly*. Vol. 29. No. 2. 2010. p. 65; Rodon; Serrano; Giménez. *Managing cultural conflicts for effective humanitarian aid*. p. 375.

<sup>25</sup> Rodon; Serrano; Giménez. *Managing cultural conflicts for effective humanitarian aid*. p. 366–376.

efficient as possible and, as conflicts cause inefficiency in humanitarian aid programs, therefore easily modify their own culture in order to avoid conflict and remain efficient.<sup>26</sup>

Another author in the field of development and humanitarian aid is Jeffery Crisp. Crisp discusses historical perspectives on UNHCR's work on development in repatriation programs. He notes that development and humanitarian aid have previously been considered as two different things since most of the refugees when UNHCR was founded, were mainly based in developed countries. When this shifted, and the majority of the world's refugees were found in poor developing countries, it made sense to include developmental programs that would hopefully make refugees more self-reliant and better prepared to return to their homes.<sup>27</sup> Crisp, alongside Jonathan Moore, argue that aid organizations need to rely on donor states funding resulting in the organizations need to show that their work is relevant and effective.<sup>28</sup> This means that one of the issues with these programs was that the donor countries held back on donations since they believed that UNHCR should not "extend its humanitarian mandate into the realm of development"<sup>29</sup>. Even though Crisp mostly discusses UNHCR's work with repatriation in the country of origin, it has relevance for this study since he discusses some historical views of how UNHCR has previously worked with development and how this has morphed into the way humanitarian aid functions today.

Another researcher contributing to the discussion about the gap between humanitarian aid and development is François Audet. His article discusses the issues with humanitarian aid and in combination with development. Audet argues that the research and thought behind this combination is reasonable and makes sense, but that in reality trying to combine the two "has done more harm than good"<sup>30</sup>. He argues that the focus on development in several cases have resulted in that organizations' work against the will of the refugees instead of assisting them<sup>31</sup>, similarly to what was discussed above. He also brings up the term "sustainable humanitarianism" which is supposed to be a way to combine sustainable development with

---

<sup>26</sup> Rodon; Serrano; Giménez. Managing cultural conflicts for effective humanitarian aid. p. 374.

<sup>27</sup> Crisp. Mind the Gap! UNHCR, Humanitarian Assistance and the Development Process. p. 169-170.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. p. 184; Moore, Jonathan. 1999. The humanitarian-development gap. *International Review of Red Cross*. Vol. 81. No. 833. p. 105-106.

<sup>29</sup> Crisp. Mind the Gap! UNHCR, Humanitarian Assistance and the Development Process. p. 184.

<sup>30</sup> Audet, François. From Disaster Relief to Development Assistance: Why Simple Solutions Don't Work. p. 111.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. p. 111.



humanitarian aid and argue that a shift in the way we see humanitarian aid is necessary if we want a change in this direction.<sup>32</sup> Similar to Crisp, Audet also notes that “one of the major challenges blocking effective transitions from emergency response to development”<sup>33</sup> is the fact that donors are not willing to contribute when the work is not specifically either aid *or* development.<sup>34</sup>

Another, rather early researcher on humanitarian aid and development is Mary B. Anderson. She also adopts a gender perspective as a whole and is therefore of extra relevance for this study. She argues that gender analysis is a good way to understand and find solutions to vulnerability.<sup>35</sup> During the time that Anderson’s article was written, NGO’s role in humanitarian aid and development was still under discussion, and people wanted to understand the relation between the two as a result from two trends. One of these trends where the fact that there were more conflicts that needed to be dealt with in a sustainable way resulting in the longing for aid that led to long-term effects. The second fact being that there were fewer donations in the area of development resulting in the lust to meet the demands of both disaster relief as well as development on the same budget.<sup>36</sup> She argues that through gender analysis, one can draw the conclusion that women are not weak because of the fact that they are women, but because of how society is built up that makes women reliant on men. She argues that understanding that vulnerability is a result of society and human action, leads to information about how to deal with the root causes of issues in refugee crises.<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup> Audet, François. From Disaster Relief to Development Assistance: Why Simple Solutions Don't Work. p. 117.

<sup>33</sup> Audet, François. From Disaster Relief to Development Assistance: Why Simple Solutions Don't Work. p. 116.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Anderson, Mary B. Understanding the Disaster-Development Continuum: Gender Analysis Is the Essential Tool. *Focus on Gender: Women and Emergencies*. Vol. 2, No. 1. February 1994. p. 8.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. p. 7.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. p. 8.

### 3 Theory: The Immanent Universal Theory of Human Rights

For this study I have chosen to use the Immanent Universal Theory of Human Rights defined by Brooke A. Ackerly. Ackerly is a professor of Political Science at Vanderbilt University as well as co-Editor-in-Chief at *International Feminist Journal of Politics*.<sup>38</sup> Her work is inspired by feminist methodologies and aims at simplifying and dilute complex international issues on injustices.

Ackerly is greatly inspired by the activist model of The Americans with Disabilities movement. The movements main point is that by focusing on involving people with disabilities in the process of making cities more accessible, both disabled as well as able bodied people will benefit from these adjustments. The classic example is lowering curbs to make crosswalks easier for people who use wheelchairs, leading them to also become easier for pedestrians with strollers, students with heavy books and elderly with bad knees.<sup>39</sup> Ackerly argues that adopting this curb cutting approach in a feminist way, will in turn improve human rights for all. What this means is that one should focus on involving women in specifying issues and pinpointing where human rights fail women, and as a bonus effect, improve the rights for all.<sup>40</sup>

Ackerly argues that her theory of human rights is necessary in order to question current ways of life and to illuminate injustices in today's society. First and foremost she argues that we live in a non-ideal world which is the reason for this theory's necessity.<sup>41</sup> This means that we need to assume that there are injustices that have not yet been brought to our attention in every society. A human rights theory should always be based on this premise in order to have a chance to actually make a difference, she states.<sup>42</sup> For the theory to be relevant there are two things that need to be fulfilled. First there need to be a "domain of continued dispute", and secondly one needs to deal with these disputes by "courageous listening".<sup>43</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> Vanderbilt University. [website] <https://www.vanderbilt.edu/political-science/bio/brooke-ackerly> (accessible 2020-05-23).

<sup>39</sup> Ackerly, Brooke A. *Feminist Curb Cuts & Critical Theory for Democratic and Human Rights Theories. Conference Papers - American Political Science Association*. August 2003. p. 2-4.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* p. 3.

<sup>41</sup> Ackerly, Brooke A. *Universal Human Rights in a World of Difference*. Cambridge: Cambridge university press, 2008. p. 202.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* p. 48-49.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* p. 206-207.

The term “continued dispute” originates from Amartya Sen, though Ackerly explains how the concept is meant to be understood, specifically in her theory. The term forms the basic understanding that when different cultures meet there will become clashes between them. She argues that these clashes can occur both in the imagination fueled by ignorance, as well as actual conflicts sparked “when people with different views talk”.<sup>44</sup> She argues that these terrains can be seen in institutions such as the UN or in different NGO settings when current issues are being resolved. Hence what is actually discussed as a dispute will vary over time, leading Ackerly to argue that being aware of what is being discussed in these terrains is an important part of the theory. Attentiveness to these terrains will therefore highlight power dynamics and show what is being viewed as a dispute worth discussing. When we shed light on what is deemed important, we are one step closer to localizing the disputes still invisible.<sup>45</sup>

The term “courageous listening” refer to Ackerly’s claim that we should find ways to dissolve continued disputes by really listening and making sure both part in a conflict gets their point of view taken into consideration. This means that one should listen without compromising your own point of view. The term is borrowed from Susan Bickford who writes:

Courageous listening in the face of fear means avoiding two extremes: one in which I simply, defensively, do not hear, and one in which I simply exchange my opinion for yours.<sup>46</sup>

Ackerly continue to argue that in order to create transformative change, the ones aiming to dissolve conflicts need to make sure attentiveness is used in order to actually understand the issue from both sides in a conflict in order to find a sustainable solution.<sup>47</sup> One needs to take other points of view into account and put them into relation to your own. There is no way forward if one part in a conflict only express their own point of view without actually understanding the other side. Avoiding conflict altogether by exchanging your own perspective

---

<sup>44</sup> Ackerly, Brooke A. *Universal Human Rights in a World of Difference*. Cambridge: Cambridge university press, 2008. p. 205.

<sup>45</sup> Ackerly. *Universal Human Rights in a World of Difference*. p. 205.

<sup>46</sup> Bickford, Susan. *The Dissonance of Democracy: Listening, Conflict and Citizenship*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996. p. 153.

<sup>47</sup> Ackerly. *Universal Human Rights in a World of Difference*. p. 207.

for the other side's, will neither result in transformative change nor sustainable peace.<sup>48</sup> Ackerly therefore mean that the main tool is listening rather than making communication between sides of a dispute based on reason.<sup>49</sup>

For Ackerly, there are no lists of which rights are to be seen as human rights. Human Rights according to Ackerly is instead a guide for how to resolve and illuminate inequalities.<sup>50</sup> This theory has two main purposes in benefiting human rights. One being to guide criticism and show where action is necessary. The second being making sure that this criticism is being directed at which and whose rights that are being recognized as well as which structures that carry the risk of violating human rights.<sup>51</sup> Human rights is according to Ackerly a reason for us to work towards dissolving disputes as well as to guide us to look for yet invisible disputes. According to Ackerly, to understand human rights it is better to see them for what they include. She has three points that specifies what she argues the scope of human rights is. The first one is to understand that “the rights of all humans are interrelated”. By this she means that there is an injustice taking place when one group has a right that another does not based on the fact that they belong to this certain group. Secondly, she argues that the rights themselves are integrated. This means that you cannot say that a person has ‘most’ of their human rights fulfilled, whilst one of these rights is clearly violated. You need access to all your rights. With this, she means that the violation of one specific human right, is in a way a violation of all of them. Thirdly, she argues that human rights need to be secured by a “fabric of social, political, and economic life”. Therefore, it takes a change in all of these areas in order to change which rights that are, or are not, secured.<sup>52</sup>

Ackerly hence argues that the Immanent Theory of Human Rights goes into the political space where power is clearly visible and where disagreements are to be resolved. She states that:

---

<sup>48</sup> Ackerly. *Universal Human Rights in a World of Difference*. p. 206.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.* p. 207.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* p. 209.

<sup>51</sup> Ackerly. *Universal Human Rights in a World of Difference*. p. 208.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.* p. 211.

[...] by making the terrains of difficulty public, the theory asks theorists and activists to take responsibility for working through political disputes about the meaning of human rights, recognizing diversity, looking out for disagreement marked as consent, and asks us to be attentive to the many ways in which epistemological power can be legitimated and abused.<sup>53</sup>

This theory will work well whilst analyzing the chosen primary material. I argue that when personnel from the UN comes to refugee camps they will naturally fall into the terrain of continued dispute. The clash between the culture of the UNHCR and the culture of refugees being one of these terrains, but also taking into consideration the fact that refugees in many cases have fled because of a conflict in their country of origin. I therefore argue that this study touches on several terrains of continued dispute. Since this study is not examining a specific conflict or case, the focus will be on the terrain of continued dispute which concerns the UNHCR and refugees in general.

In the method, the theory will be used mainly in the final step where the initial findings are to be connected to the chosen theory. In this stage, I will use Ackerly's ideas on continued dispute, courageous listening, curb cutting as well as the fact that change needs to be rooted in all areas of life for it to last. This theory will provide us with a framework to find which areas might need more work as well as a clear way of reaching an answer to the research question.

---

<sup>53</sup> Ackerly. *Universal Human Rights in a World of Difference*. p. 204.

## 4 Method: Ideology criticism

This study will use ideology criticism as a method. According to Bergström and Boréus, ideology criticism is useful for texts that analyze power relations and can help visualize how ideology differ from reality.<sup>54</sup> Bergström and Boréus also write that the method is well suited to pair with research that deals with power hierarchies and therefore is a suitable choice for this study.<sup>55</sup> The analysis of the policy documents will result in an expression for the documents ideology, which can then be contrasted to reality.<sup>56</sup> I hence believe this method will go well with the purpose of this study.

The term 'ideology' is used in a wide variety of ways and can hence mean different things depending on the context. I will therefore go over what I mean when ideology is used in this study. According to Bergström and Boréus, an idea is always marked by continuity and stability and not something spontaneous or fluctuating. In their book, they use the term as something that can be "both an understanding of reality, as well as a valuation of occurrences or an understanding of how one should act".<sup>57</sup> I will use the term in the same way. After analyzing the document according to the steps provided by Bergström and Boréus (as shown below), we will have highlighted how groups are perceived and how they should act according to the documents ideology, and therefore also to some extent according to UNHCR:s culture.

According to Bergström and Boréus, when ideology criticism is used there are three steps that need to be followed.<sup>58</sup> Initially, the text needs to be analyzed. This can be done by following the three questions that Bergström and Boréus present (question 1, 2 and 3 below).<sup>59</sup> When this is done, we have completed the first step in analyzing the actual text. The second step is a discussion about what the text is referring to, or in which reality the text is played

---

<sup>54</sup> Bergström, Göran; Boréus, Karin. Idé- och ideologianalys. In Bergström, Göran; Boréus, Karin (eds.). *Textens Mening och Makt: Metodbok i Samhällsvetenskaplig text- och diskursanalys*. Third Edition. Lund: Studentlitteratur AB. 2012. p. 148.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. p. 160.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. p. 148-149.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid. p. 140 [translated from Swedish.].

<sup>58</sup> Bergström; Boréus. Idé- och ideologianalys. p. 173.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. p. 160-163.

out.<sup>60</sup> This step will be performed by adding another question (question 2.1 and 2.2) to the investigation, as seen below.

### **Step 1**

1. How are relations between different groups described?
2. How are these relations valued?
3. How are the groups supposed to act according to how their relations are valued?

### **Step 2**

4. In what reality is the document produced, who is the intended reader and who is the producer?
5. How does this affect the results from the previous questions?

### **Step 3 - Theoretical connections**

After step 1 and 2, the 3rd and final step (theoretical connections) is according to Bergström and Boréus where the ideas described in the first two steps get their final context. Bergström and Boréus mean that ideologies need to be connected to reality in order to have meaning. Although step two in a way connects the results to the outside world, the third step is supposed to take this to another level and spark a discussion that connects the results to the research question.<sup>61</sup> In step 3 the results from step one and two will be put into relation to Ackerly's theory on human rights. In step 3 I will go through her main points together with the findings from the previous steps. I argue that step three also is performed in the final discussion of this study, where the results are discussed more loosely and also put in relation to previous research.

The previously presented methodological questions will guide the analysis. It will be further divided into categories that will be analyzed in the investigation. The relation between the following groups will be examined: (1) UNHCR; (2) Refugee women and (3) Refugee men. I am aware that I have not included any group that allows for analyzing how refugees with non-traditional gender identities are perceived. Although this is a highly relevant aspect of this topic,

---

<sup>60</sup> Bergström; Boréus. *Idé- och ideologianalys*, p. 161.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.* p. 173.

the size and scope of this study does not allow for this to be considered. The relations that I believe are more relevant to the aim of this study and relevant in regard to the research question are the ones that have been selected. Where the focus lies on the relation between UNHCR, refugees and on gender inequality. The relations between all of the categories will be examined as follows: (1) UNHCR and refugee women; (2) UNHCR and refugee men, and finally (3); Refugee women and refugee men

These groups will be examined one at a time. Step one and two (as presented above) will be repeated for each and every relation examined. I have chosen to include some, but not all quotes from which I make conclusions. To include them all would take up too much space and result in unnecessary repetition. I will instead include the quotes found more relevant or illustrating. As stated before, the documents will be analyzed at the same time, and therefore the documents will not have separate sections in the investigation. But I will, as stated earlier, distinguish between them, and point out differences if necessary.



## 5 Analysis

In this section, the primary material will be analyzed with the help of the method described above. I will take the time here to quickly re-introduce the two documents that make up the primary material. First off, we have the policy document that covers UNHCR's policy on gender inequalities, which also includes policy statements that the staff is to act in accordance with. The second document is the review of UNHCR's work on gender inequalities 2016 and covers the issues and recommendations from that year, which also partly shaped the policy document. As stated before, they will not be differentiated individually in this section, and quotes from both documents will be included. I also want to remind the reader about the purpose of this study, which is to examine UNHCR's perception of gender roles and ways of working towards gender equality and see whether these show signs of creating a permanent change in refugee communities in accordance to Ackerly's theory.

### 5.1 Step 1

In this initial step, the relations between the chosen groups will be examined with the help of the questions above.

#### 5.1.1 UNHCR and refugee women

##### 5.1.1.1 How is the relation between the groups described?

By looking at how UNHCR portray the relation between refugee women and UNHCR, we can see that refugee women are mainly portrayed as the ones gaining from UNHCR's presence and work on gender equality. The fact that the cultures refugees live in ascribe women with negative

gender roles is lifted several times throughout both documents.<sup>62</sup> There is consistently a discussion in both documents that lift ways to make refugee women and girls equal to men and boys, and one way is through providing the younger generations with education:

These efforts are complemented by initiatives to increase educational opportunities for all refugees, but especially women and girls<sup>63</sup>

This quote shows how refugee women and girls are seen as in extra need of assistance to receive education, and that UNHCR is there to provide it to them. The following quote is especially expressive of how refugee women are understood by UNHCR and are one amongst many which portray women as extra vulnerable as a result of gender norms:

Women and girls take on important roles in their communities and families, and contribute in various ways to strengthening protection and solutions. However, negative gender roles ascribed to them often ensure that they face specific, severe, and wide-spread barriers to accessing their rights, including fewer opportunities and resources, lower socioeconomic status, less power and influence, numerous forms of discrimination, and heightened protection risks, including of SGBV.<sup>64</sup>

Refugee women are seen as caregivers and protectors of families and communities, but held back and oppressed by the cultures they live in. UNHCR is there to provide refugee women with opportunities that should make them more equal to refugee men. They are committed to helping women and girls and to provide them with the human rights they are entitled to.

---

<sup>62</sup> UNHCR. UNHCR Policy on Age, Gender and Diversity. p. 14, 19, 21; UNHCR. UNHCR Review of Gender Equality in Operations. p. 5, 8, 15.

<sup>63</sup> UNHCR. UNHCR Review of Gender Equality in Operations. p. 5.

<sup>64</sup> UNHCR. UNHCR Policy on Age, Gender and Diversity. p. 19.

### 5.1.1.2 How is this relation valued?

UNHCR is described to have an obligation, especially towards women and girls.<sup>65</sup> Throughout both documents, UNHCR proclaims that they have already improved their work to create better opportunities for women and girls.<sup>66</sup> When UNHCR is at work in a refugee camp, they imply that they will make sure women and girls will get equal rights to men and boys - they give the examples of providing work opportunities for women and making sure they have access to health care. Two things that are mentioned several times is that women will be equally active in decision-making and that UNHCR wants to increase the number of women as “primary recipient of assistance”<sup>67</sup>, as it has shown that this can be good for the family<sup>68</sup>.

The relation between UNHCR and refugee women is seen as one that will benefit both parts. First and foremost, UNHCR is seen as supportive for women by having special obligations towards them, stating that “this Commitment is essential to women and girls’ ability to determine their own futures”<sup>69</sup>. Women are also seen as a group that will help UNHCR in their work. For example, women are seen as necessary in order for them to successfully lift matters that concern them:

[...] importance of women’s equal and full participation in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in sustaining peace and security.<sup>70</sup>

UNHCR has taken numerous steps to increase the meaningful and active participation of women with the aim of ensuring greater influence over decision making that impacts them, their families and their communities.<sup>71</sup>

What is especially worth noticing here is that women’s participation is seen as something important in order to reach a sustainable peace. The relation is hence seen as important for UNHCR’s aim as an organization. UNHCR paves the way for women to take place and in order for them to be a key to sustainable peace.

---

<sup>65</sup> UNHCR. UNHCR Policy on Age, Gender and Diversity. p. 4.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid. p. 6.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid. p. 9.

<sup>68</sup> UNHCR. UNHCR Review of Gender Equality in Operations. p. 7.

<sup>69</sup> UNHCR. UNHCR Policy on Age, Gender and Diversity. p. 13.

<sup>70</sup> UNHCR. UNHCR Review of Gender Equality in Operations. p. 5.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. p. 4.

### 5.1.1.3 How are the groups supposed to act according to how their relation is valued?

First off, both documents discuss very specific things that UNHCR is to do in order to live up to the relation between refugee women and UNHCR. Because of their specific obligations towards women, which in addition to the fact that they are an organization created to help refugees, leads us to expect that UNHCR will act in a way that does just that. I will not include all examples of how they will work with these questions, but only lift one that is particularly representative of this.

UNHCR operations will ensure 50 per cent female participants in management and leadership structures under UNHCR's authority<sup>72</sup>

As long as UNHCR is in place at a refugee camp, they will work with making refugee women equal to refugee men. Whilst what UNHCR is expected to do in this relation is quite clear, the expectations on refugee women requires further examination. From what was suggested in the previous sections, the documents present women as caregivers and protectors of the community and family. The refugee woman is therefore expected to continue to act this way when they are provided with "greater influence over decision(s)"<sup>73</sup>.

As stated before, the documents state that including women and working on making them more equal, will be important in order to achieve a lasting peace.<sup>74</sup> Women are indeed seen as nurturing and caring for both the community and children<sup>75</sup>. Connections are drawn between the well-being of families and women having "access and equal control and management"<sup>76</sup> over aid. It is also common to see connections between women and children, for example about women being "constantly worried about their children"<sup>77</sup> and about women not wanting "to be resettled without their children or other dependents"<sup>78</sup>. There are also quotes

---

<sup>72</sup> UNHCR. UNHCR Policy on Age, Gender and Diversity. p. 9.

<sup>73</sup> UNHCR. UNHCR Review of Gender Equality in Operations. p. 18 [own brackets].

<sup>74</sup> Ibid. p. 5.

<sup>75</sup> UNHCR. UNHCR Policy on Age, Gender and Diversity. p. 19.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid. p. 14.

<sup>77</sup> UNHCR. UNHCR Review of Gender Equality in Operations. p. 7.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. p. 17.

about women sometimes not being able to participate because of the lack of access to childcare<sup>79</sup> - again portraying that the women are the ones taking care of the children and the family.

Women are seen as good at protecting and caring for the community<sup>80</sup> but a lack of control hinder women from taking this role.<sup>81</sup> This is where UNHCR comes in, by pushing for equal participation women and providing them with the rights they are entitled to, they can take on this role and secure a long lasting peace.

## 5.1.2 UNHCR and refugee men

### 5.1.2.1 How is the relation between the groups described?

First off it is worth noting that throughout the document, refugee men are not discussed to the same extent as refugee women. This does not mean that they are excluded from the discussion. In the document, it is noted several times that “gender inequalities also negatively impact men and boys”<sup>82</sup> and that SGBV also impact men.<sup>83</sup>

SGBV threatens displaced women, girls, boys and men in all regions of the world.<sup>84</sup>

Strengthen screening mechanisms to identify and respond to women and girls who are at heightened risk of sexual violence and other forms of gender based violence.<sup>85</sup>

---

<sup>79</sup> UNHCR. UNHCR Review of Gender Equality in Operations. p. 5, 10.

<sup>80</sup> UNHCR. UNHCR Policy on Age, Gender and Diversity. p. 14: UNHCR. UNHCR Review of Gender Equality in Operations. p. 7.

<sup>81</sup> UNHCR. UNHCR Policy on Age, Gender and Diversity. p. 14.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid. p. 12.

<sup>83</sup> UNHCR. UNHCR Policy on Age, Gender and Diversity. p. 19: UNHCR. UNHCR Review of Gender Equality in Operations. p. 8.

<sup>84</sup> UNHCR. UNHCR Review of Gender Equality in Operations. p. 8.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. p. 10.

It is evident that UNHCR is aware that gender inequalities and SGBV also affect men.<sup>86</sup> But because of the big focus on how women are affected, and the fact that most SGBV perpetrators are men, the focus never lies on how to protect men at risk. Instead, the focus lies on UNHCR's work with educating and bringing awareness for men and boys. Another quote that I think shows a similar theme is the following:

The majority of operations note that, in principle, they provide both men and women with equal access to registration. [...] Registration processes often give priority to women deemed to be at heightened risk.<sup>87</sup>

This quote shows how UNHCR's priority towards women might result in overlooking men at risk. They are provided equal access, but women who are at risk are prioritized before men at risk. As explained before, equal participation is one way that they will work towards a more equal society, and in the documents, and a good relationship between UNHCR and refugee men is seen as a requirement<sup>88</sup>, as shown in the following quote:

Equal participation and opportunities for leadership, in turn, require strengthened engagement with men and boys including through dialogue and awareness-raising on gender equality.<sup>89</sup>

Different from UNHCR's relation with refugee women, UNHCR does not express any equivalent obligation towards helping refugee men. It is noted several times that UNHCR is working with men through "awareness-raising"<sup>90</sup>. Similarly, to the quote above, it is implied that men's role in UNHCR's work towards gender equality between refugees, is to become "agents of change"<sup>91</sup>. They become this by getting educated on gender equality and SGBV, and

---

<sup>86</sup> UNHCR. UNHCR Policy on Age, Gender and Diversity. p. 12, 14; UNHCR. UNHCR Review of Gender Equality in Operations. p. 8.

<sup>87</sup> UNHCR. UNHCR Review of Gender Equality in Operations. p. 6.

<sup>88</sup> UNHCR. UNHCR Policy on Age, Gender and Diversity. p. 13, 14; UNHCR. UNHCR Review of Gender Equality in Operations. p. 28.

<sup>89</sup> UNHCR. UNHCR Policy on Age, Gender and Diversity. p. 13.

<sup>90</sup> UNHCR. UNHCR Policy on Age, Gender and Diversity. p. 13; UNHCR. UNHCR Review of Gender Equality in Operations. p. 2, 5, 10.

<sup>91</sup> UNHCR. UNHCR Policy on Age, Gender and Diversity. p. 19.

as a result, they can create change in their own society. Refugee men are seen as powerful in refugee societies, which is seen by quotes cited during the section where we looked at the relation between UNHCR and refugee women. The relation between UNHCR and refugee men is hence more focused on UNHCR providing refugee men with education and them becoming “agents of change” and allowing UNHCR’s work on gender equality to take place.

### 5.1.2.2 How is this relation valued?

This relation is highly valued from UNHCR’s perspective. The fact that a good relation between refugee men and UNHCR is important is raised several times throughout both documents.<sup>92</sup> Refugee men are seen as the ones with more influence and power in the community, which results in the fact that UNHCR needs the relation to be good in order to simplify their work on gender equality. Similar to some quotes already presented here, men holding back women<sup>93</sup>, as well as changing social attitudes<sup>94</sup> is included as one of many needs and challenges. This portrays men as a difficult group to work with, increasing the importance of having a good relation to them, without the expense of easing up on their work with gender equality.

### 5.1.2.3 How are the groups supposed to act according to how their relation is valued?

Men and boys can be agents of change for rights promotion, including increasing gender equality and preventing SGBV. Displacement creates protection risks for men and boys, including trafficking, forced recruitment, and certain forms of violence, including SGBV.<sup>95</sup>

---

<sup>92</sup> UNHCR. UNHCR Policy on Age, Gender and Diversity. p. 13, 14. UNHCR. UNHCR Review of Gender Equality in Operations. p. 28.

<sup>93</sup> UNHCR. UNHCR Review of Gender Equality in Operations. p. 16.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid. p. 6.

<sup>95</sup> UNHCR. UNHCR Policy on Age, Gender and Diversity. p. 19.

Refugee men are seen as a group that is supposed to work together with UNHCR on gender inequality, as it is something that also impacts them negatively. UNHCR states that “SGBV disproportionately affects women and girls, but also men, boys, and persons with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities”,<sup>96</sup> resulting in the view that even though men also are affected, they are still less affected by SGBV and gender inequality when compared to women. UNHCR clearly has a focus on helping those who are less privileged, giving us the impression that people who are well off should assist those who are not. As men are perceived as the more privileged gender, they are therefore seen as also carrying the obligation to assist the less privileged women, in the same way that UNHCR is more privileged and assist refugees. Therefore, the documents portray refugee men as having an obligation to help UNHCR in the work towards gender equality. Refugee men are seen as being both a hinder and an important ally in the work with gender equality. They are to be educated by UNHCR and in turn become “agents of change” and promote gender equality in their community.

At several times, it is stated that women cannot always make decisions for themselves, because “male community leaders and heads of family impose restrictions on the ability of women and girls”<sup>97</sup>. Men are described as the ones with more power in society. Even though this is not exactly described in the document, but from the fact that women need to be given more space and influence in order to improve gender equality, one can conclude that men have too much influence. The relation between UNHCR and refugee men is based on the premise that men need to back down in order to allow for a change towards gender equality, allowing women to step up.<sup>98</sup>

---

<sup>96</sup> UNHCR. UNHCR Policy on Age, Gender and Diversity. p. 14.

<sup>97</sup> UNHCR. UNHCR Review of Gender Equality in Operations. p. 2, 16 (similar statements: UNHCR. UNHCR Review of Gender Equality in Operations. p. 5, 8).

<sup>98</sup> UNHCR. UNHCR Policy on Age, Gender and Diversity. p. 21.



## 5.1.3 Refugee women and refugee men

### 5.1.3.1 How are relations between different groups described?

The main way the relation between refugee women and refugee men is described in is that refugee men are holding refugee women back. Women are not allowed to do certain things and excluded from decision making. How women and men are portrayed has already been discussed to some extent in this study but will be further developed in this section. First and foremost, women are described as a group that would, with more influence in the society, bring peace and justice to the community. In relation to refugee men, women are portrayed as more likely to make decisions that would benefit the whole community. Therefore, it is described as a further reason for the importance for refugee women to become equal with men in decision making. Though refugee men are not specifically named in the discussion, it is clear that they are a part of the group that holds women back, as seen in the following quotes:

[...] the importance of women's equal and full participation in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in sustaining peace and security<sup>99</sup>

[...] numerous operations highlight difficulties in ensuring that women play a meaningful role in leadership and management structures. Among the largest obstacles to participation are the socio-cultural norms that enforce restrictive gender roles.<sup>100</sup>

Socio-cultural norms are described as something that makes refugee women restrained by these gender roles, and automatically something that makes refugee men in charge. Socio-cultural norms are of course something that women as well as men follow. To say that only refugee men are holding women back is somewhat extreme, as women to some extent also need to follow these for the norm to be upheld. But as seen in the following quote, refugee men are described as the ones who need to let go of power whilst women need to learn how to make decisions:

---

<sup>99</sup> UNHCR. UNHCR Review of Gender Equality in Operations. p. 5.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

[...] operation works directly with women to support them to develop their decision making and leadership skills. Men and boys, meanwhile, are given training on women's empowerment and gender equality.<sup>101</sup>

The relation is hence described as both women and men living in a community where the norm is that women have less influence over decisions that affect their surroundings, whilst men have more influence. Women are described as the main career for the community who takes care of children and make decisions that benefit more people. Men on the other hand are as a result described as less capable to create lasting peace and someone who does not take responsibility for the community's best.

### 5.1.3.2 How are these relations valued?

This relationship is described negatively mainly due to the power division between the two groups. Refugee men and refugee women have different amounts of power and this is the main thing that is portrayed as something negative. The documents both lift that if women had more power in refugee communities, it would benefit the community as well as make the operation more effective. The documents both discuss the fact that women often are held back by socio-cultural norms. The following two quotes shows both of these points but also illustrate how they in a way contradict each other:

A recent multi-country study shows that giving priority to women in food distribution is strongly correlated with greater dietary diversity. For example, in one country, the prioritization of women in food distribution led to a 37 per cent reduction in the prevalence of hunger.<sup>102</sup>

[...] numerous operations highlight difficulties in ensuring that women play a meaningful role in leadership and management structures. Among the largest obstacles to participation are the socio-cultural norms that enforce restrictive gender roles.<sup>103</sup>

---

<sup>101</sup> UNHCR. UNHCR Review of Gender Equality in Operations. p. 5.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid. p. 7.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid. p. 5.

The first quote shows us how refugee women are seen as a group that is more capable of distributing food more evenly in a community. Men is by default portrayed as a group that, in this case, provides food in a way that results in a higher level of hunger compared to women. This is just an example of how women are portrayed as more capable of taking care of the community. Men are then by default portrayed as less capable to care for the community. The second quote on the other hand describes how refugee women are held back by socio-cultural norms and restrictive gender roles. Giving women a responsibility that in refugee communities that might previously have belonged to men, might in a way challenge the prevailing gender norms. But traditionally, making and providing the family with food is traditionally a chore that belongs to women.

The relationship between refugee women and refugee men is hence marked by refugee men enforcing social norms that restrict what women are allowed to do. This part of the relationship is described as something negative that needs to be changed.

### 5.1.3.3 How are the groups supposed to act according to how their relations are valued?

Refugee men and refugee women are, based on how they are described in the documents, supposed to both be a part of the change that UNHCR wants to see. UNHCR wants to incite this change by educating refugee men on gender equality whilst refugee women should be educated in decision making and improve their leadership skills. UNHCR is firm in the belief that improving gender equality will result in an improvement for all:

UNHCR remains steadfastly committed to the concept that investing in gender equality improves the protection environment for all persons of concern.<sup>104</sup>

---

<sup>104</sup> UNHCR. UNHCR Review of Gender Equality in Operations. p. 28.

We want to ensure transformative change. We want to build on our existing work and seek further opportunities for positive social change that will transform gender relations in the longterm. We want to challenge stereotypes and change unequal power relationships between women, men, girls, and boys.<sup>105</sup>

This is only possible, of course, as long as UNHCR get both refugee women and refugee men to join their activities and have a will to participate in their education and leadership structures. It is important for UNHCR that as many refugees as possible engage in the community. It is mainly refugee men who need to change in order to become more allowing to what women in their community is allowed to do as well as become agents of change in order to influence others in their communities. Refugee women need to keep on caring for their families and communities but now in a more leading way and engage in decision making and take on a leadership role. In a way they are described to stay the same but in need of more power - which refugee men should freely provide this to them after receiving education on the benefits of gender equality:

Equal participation and opportunities for leadership, in turn, require strengthened engagement with men and boys including through dialogue and awareness-raising on gender equality.<sup>106</sup>

Women and girls take on important roles in their communities and families, and contribute in various ways to strengthening protection and solutions. ... Men and boys can be agents of change for rights promotion, including increasing gender equality and preventing SGBV. Displacement creates protection risks for men and boys, including trafficking, forced recruitment, and certain forms of violence, including SGBV.<sup>107</sup>

The relation is in conclusion described as both women and men living in a community where the norm is that women have less influence over decisions that affect their community, whilst men have more influence. This is described as something negative, since if women to a larger extent were in power the effects would be a more sustainable peace, and in order for this

---

<sup>105</sup> UNHCR. UNHCR Policy on Age, Gender and Diversity. p. 21.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid. p. 13.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid. p. 19.

norm to be challenged women need to receive bigger influence in the community whilst men need to allow women to take this space. Men are to get educated on gender equality and thereafter naturally increase the inclusion of women in decision making.

## 5.2 Step 2

During step one, we went over the relations between UNHCR, refugee women and refugee men, as well as the perception of the relation between these. Conclusions were drawn about UNHCR coming off as the provider of both emergency relief and development programs. Refugee women are seen as taking responsibility in the refugee community, for example by being good at distributing food and taking care of children. Refugee men on the other hand are seen as in need of education in gender equality and improve by allowing women to take their space in decision making.

Both refugee men and refugee women are seen as restricted by societal norms making them hold on to gender specific stereotypes. With the help of UNHCR they will get educated on gender equality and move away from traditional gender roles. Both refugee women and refugee men have similarly been seen as supposed to act in accordance with the aid that UNHCR provides. It is seen as unreasonable for any refugee to not participate meaningfully and provide feedback as to how humanitarian aid can improve. This brings us to the second step of the analysis by answering question 4 and 5 as presented in the method.

### 5.2.1 In what reality is the document produced, who is the intended reader and who is the producer?

Both documents are created and spread internally in UNHCR even though they are accessible for the public through UNHCR's website. UNHCR does not provide any information as to which documents are more commonly referred to. But in the aspect of being a rather fresh policy document, one could conclude that it is of higher relevance today. The review document might be less spread to current staff, but as it contains a review of previous ways of working with gender inequalities, it still holds relevant information and has provided information about

what the policy document should include. The policy document, on the other hand, would be spread on a bigger scale since it states that “compliance with this Policy is mandatory”.<sup>108</sup>

As mentioned in section 1.4 Material, The review document is created with information gathered from a “survey of 55 UNHCR field operations, as well as interviews with key informants in 15 countries, four field missions”, as well as from dialogues with over 1000 refugees.<sup>109</sup> The policy document is in turn partially based on the results from the review and contains UNHCR’s updated commitments to women and girls. These documents are not created with the purpose of being researched but can of course still say a lot of things about UNHCR’s views on gender.

To sum this up, both these documents are created both by and for UNHCR staff. One of the documents, the policy, is written in order to bring together how such a big organization such as UNHCR intended to work with gender equality, which will require some clear standpoints. The other document, the review, is also in a way steering the way of how the policy document is laid out.

### 5.2.2 How does this affect the results from the previous questions?

Even though the review document does have some input from refugees, it does not necessarily mean that they have had a direct say in how the document portrays them. These refugees are also most likely from several different camps, and it can therefore be hard for them to actually provide information that UNHCR can apply to this broad overview of their gender equality work. This is because it is hard to apply specific cases to a more general review, somethings that one refugee lift as something negative, might be lifted by another as something positive in another camp. This is not to question the importance of UNHCR’s interviews with a substantial number of refugees, just to lift a relevant discussion about how much these interviews have affected how refugees are portrayed in these documents.

Either way, refugee women and men and their relation to UNHCR is more or less simplified in these documents. The documents provide a view of these relations in general,

---

<sup>108</sup> UNHCR. UNHCR Policy on Age, Gender and Diversity. p. 5.

<sup>109</sup> UNHCR. UNHCR Review of Gender Equality in Operations. p. 3.

they do not have the possibility to go into details about how these relations differ from case to case, resulting in a view that takes the more common opinions and points to portray the average relation. I argue that both the policy and review document oversimplify how the relations between the different groups are understood. This is of course both rather inevitable as well as an issue. Inevitable because these are after all official documents, that cannot afford to go into specific details and where covering the major points is more important. As stated earlier, the documents are not created for me to analyze in this specific way and I can hence not assume that all their standpoints on this matter are possible to be read into the material. With this said, I still argue that this study is able to come to further insight into UNHCR as an organization and their view on gender struggles in refugee settings.

The fact that the documents tend to oversimplify, leads to the documents smoothing out relations. This becomes an issue because the roles of these different groups become rather rigid. Women and men are assumed to take on specific roles and act in certain ways. When these documents are spread internally, and staff is encouraged to act in accordance with them, these ideas about how different individuals are supposed to act is also passed on as facts.

### 5.3 Step 3 - Theoretical connections

In this section, the third and final step of the method will be performed. This is where connections between the analysis and Ackerly's theory on human rights will be presented. These will be discussed further in the final discussion of the study where, to some extent, the third step of the method is finalized. By focusing on identifying connections to courageous listening, terrains of continued dispute and curb cutting we will be able to see how UNHCR's work on gender equality have a way to change these societal fabrics and secure the rights of refugees in the long run.

We start this section off by examining how the term "terrain of continued dispute" connects to the analysis. There are of course many terrains of continued dispute specific to a refugee camp, and these will differ from camp to camp depending on the situation at hand. These may be issues that has existed for a long time and brought along when refugees left their homes. I will not go further into the terrains of continued dispute that are specific to every camp but instead focus on the one most relevant to this study.

The main issue described in both documents is of course the fact that there is generally no gender equality in refugee communities. It is UNHCR's goal to reach gender equality and change the cultural norms that hold up traditional gender roles. In the analysis it was suggested that UNHCR portrays gender inequality as something that affects both men and women negatively since they are constrained to these rigid gender roles. As stated in the analysis, these gender roles can not only be upheld by refugee men, but also require refugee women to conform to the traditional female gender role. The fact that women might not have as much to say about decisions that affect their life, might therefore not be described as an issue by all refugee women. This is therefore on a first glance not a terrain of continued dispute not because all refugee feels the injustice, but because this way of life goes against what we think we know about human rights. With this being said, UNHCR's goal to reach gender equality is not illegitimate.

In accordance with Ackerly, human rights are a tool to guide criticism and target action. She argues that there is no set of human rights that we can point at when saying that someone's rights is being violated. Ackerly instead argues that "the rights to all humans are interrelated"<sup>110</sup>. In the analysis it was clear that refugee men generally have opportunities that refugee women do not have based on the fact that they are women, and therefore one can say that women and men are not equal. Having unequal opportunities and possibilities is something that should be limited and therefore trying to equalize women to men is in accordance with Ackerly's theory on human rights. The most prominent terrain of continued dispute in the examined documents is therefore sparked by UNHCR's work to secure women's human rights and make refugee women equal to refugee men in the communities.

The next theme in Ackerly's theory to be connected to the findings in the analysis is that of "courageous listening". This theme is mainly connected to the section in the analysis where we examined how the different groups were supposed to act in accordance with how the relation was valued. In the analysis, it was found that refugee women should be given more room to express their thoughts and ideas on how to run things in camp and at large become more involved in the making of decisions. This nicely connects to the theme in Ackerly's theory, women are given the space to express their fears and thoughts on issues and UNHCR seem willing to listen and adjust their ways to adapt in given situations.

---

<sup>110</sup> Ackerly. *Universal Human Rights in a World of Difference*. p. 211.



The analysis also suggested that refugee men are seen as a group that it is necessary for UNHCR to be on good terms with. This naturally includes good communication. In the analysis, it was noted that there is a difference between the way refugee women and refugee men are supposed to act in accordance with how the relations are valued. Refugee women are to become leaders and become more prominent in decision making. From this conclusion, it is apparent that UNHCR to some extent value courageous listening. It is clear that the aspiration from including women in decision making, is that they should contribute with their thoughts and ideas, but not to take over the leadership role completely. This requires courageous listening and therefore I argue that UNHCR does show signs of acknowledging the importance of this.

What is worth noting is the difference between refugee women's and men's supposed actions. Refugee women are to a larger extent described as required to take more space and therefore the one to listen to, whilst refugee men are to decrease their influence and get educated. Refugee men are described as to be expected to cooperate with UNHCR's plan and become agents of change. UNHCR states that for refugee men to become agents of change, it takes a "strengthened engagement with men and boys including through dialogue and awareness-raising on gender equality"<sup>111</sup>. Even though UNHCR does seem to acknowledge the importance of courageous listening, the analysis also showed that the focus lies less on listening and taking refugee men's perspectives into account, and more in educating them and ultimately making them listen and understand the importance of UNHCR's work towards gender equality. In the theory it is stated that it is not enough to just listen - but to listen courageously. From this perspective, UNHCR seems to have more to work on in this relation. As stated before, this study does not have the ability to cross reference how well this policy is applied in the field. How well the communication between refugees and UNHCR goes is surely dependent on both the specific case as well as the personnel in place.

This brings us over to connecting Ackerly's theme on curb cutting to the findings in the analysis. In the analysis it was suggested from UNHCR's relation with refugee women and how providing women with more power seemed to be connected to the increased efficiency of emergency relief. The analysis previously lifted an example where it was stated that when providing women with greater influence over food distribution, the whole community benefited

---

<sup>111</sup> UNHCR. UNHCR Policy on Age, Gender and Diversity. p. 13.

from it. Including women in decision making was also suggested from the analysis to be seen as a way to reach sustainable peace. All of these examples show signs of UNHCR adapting the curb cutting approach and gaining from it.

Another place where a feminist curb cutting approach might be seen is in UNHCR's work to prevent SGBV. As refugee women to a larger extent are exposed to the threat of SGBV, the focus naturally lies on listening to refugee women as to when they for example feel insecure and to find ways to minimize these situations. From the first step in the analysis it was also suggested that UNHCR recognize that refugee men also are affected by SGBV, but that the focus rarely was on how to protect specifically men from SGBV. The focus rather lies on discussions with refugee women on how to best help them avoid this type of violence. With a look at how this connects to the theory, focusing on refugee women and findings solutions to minimizing their vulnerability by for example placing lights in darker areas, should also benefit men who are at heightened risk to be exposed to SGBV.

To finish this section off, I wish to make connections to what Ackerly calls the fabric. Ackerly argues that if a change is to actually become permanent, the desired change needs to be rooted in the social, political, and economic life.<sup>112</sup> If the change is only present in one of these areas, it will not be rooted in all areas of life and therefore will not have the ability to become a permanent change. In both documents, it is clear that UNHCR want the change to be permanent, and that they aspire to make this change in all these areas of life. They aim to educate both women and men, providing both groups with an equal amount of work opportunities and therefore opening the door for gender equality in the economic sphere. The political sphere will also be changed with UNHCR's promise to have an equal number of women and men involved in decision making. As women and men take on the same amount of responsibility to make decisions together and share the load of working and caring for the private economy, a shift in the social life is inevitable. Another sign of UNHCR also wanting a change in the social life, could be seen in the saying that "this Commitment is essential to women and girls' ability to determine their own futures"<sup>113</sup>. With women able to make decisions for themselves, this is definitely a sign of social life being challenged in UNHCR's ways to run a refugee camp. In the analysis it was also evident that UNHCR aim to change

---

<sup>112</sup> Ackerly. *Universal Human Rights in a World of Difference*. p. 211.

<sup>113</sup> UNHCR. *UNHCR Policy on Age, Gender and Diversity*. p. 13.

social attitudes by education in order to reach a transformative change. From this, it is evident that all areas of life are targeted and therefore the change has the potential to be permanent.

The only thing left to note here is that refugee camps are not the refugees' home, even though many refugees spend a long time in them. The ultimate goal must be that refugees have the opportunity to return to their actual homes when possible. What happens to this newly developed fabric when returning home is unknown for every case. When leaving camp, UNHCR no longer have any influence over how many percentages of women and men are involved in decision making nor who is in charge of food distribution. Power hierarchies shifts when one group is removed from the mix and therefore the fabric shift as well. The change towards gender equality must thus be made by the will of the refugees themselves, in order for the change to stay in place when life returns to the home base.

I wish to recap what has so far been done in this study. By identifying connections to courageous listening, terrains of continued dispute and curb cutting, as well as the fabric, we have gone through the steps of the method and analyzed the documents in order to see whether the changes caused by UNHCR's work on gender equality have the ability to become permanent ones. When connecting the findings of the analysis to the chosen theory, it was clear that UNHCR does to some extent have the ability to affect the way refugees live their lives, as long as they are in refugee camps.

The main issue discussed in the documents was concluded to be that of gender inequality and is therefore the main terrain of continued dispute evident from the material. It was also concluded that UNHCR's work on gender equality in and of itself is have positive aspects since it promotes human rights and works to eliminate injustices. When drawing connections to the term courageous listening, it was concluded that UNHCR's chosen way to promote this change is by educating refugees, both men and women, in gender equality and decision making. When it comes to listening it was concluded that UNHCR show signs of mainly listening to refugee women rather than refugee men, even though it was also noted as a good relationship and therefore also to some extent a good communication with refugee men was seen as equally important. From the term courageous listening it was suggested that UNHCR does want to listen and incorporate ideas and thoughts from refugee women as well as refugee men. But there were no signs of UNHCR being eager to ease up on their requirements in their work to promote gender equality, but rather to find other ways to involve refugees in what they call meaningful participation. Mainly the area of courageous listening is where UNHCR can advance their work. Conclusions were also made to the term curb cutting.

As the focus often lies on how to improve refugee women's freedom and ability to be included in decision making, it is also often lifted that this will also result in benefits for all. Finally, connections to the fact that these changes need to be evident in all areas of life in order for the fabric to be changed permanently was made. From these connections it was concluded that UNHCR might have a way to make a change towards gender equality in refugee camps, but if this change is to be a permanent one that lasts even when the possibility arises for refugees to return home is unknown and will vary from case to case.

## 6 Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine whether UNHCR's perception of gender roles and ways of working towards gender equality show signs of being able to create a permanent change in refugee communities. The study was performed with a critical ideological analysis together with Ackerly's immanent theory on human rights. The findings indicate that UNHCR's view of gender and equality as well as their approach to improve gender inequality show signs of having the potential to create real change, but that the durability of their work is uncertain due to the unknown ability of UNHCR to use courageous listening as well as the fact that when refugees return home the progression is no longer controlled by UNHCR. In this section the findings from the analysis will be discussed further with connections drawn to previous research.

Freedman argues that it is clear that UNHCR has all the real power over refugees in camp settings, and that when refugees take part in what UNHCR calls "meaningful participation", they do not really have any specific ways to change UNHCR's priorities on gender equality.<sup>114</sup> Freedman argues that since this is the case, it is common for refugees to try to manipulate UNHCR staff in order to receive extra equipment, food, or other aid. The fact that UNHCR portray refugee women as extra vulnerable makes it somewhat easier for refugee women to utilize this method.<sup>115</sup>

Fiddian-Qasmiyeh also discusses this and states that the most effective way for refugees to receive qualitative aid from humanitarian organizations is to "integrate themselves" with aid providers.<sup>116</sup> When aid organizations are focused on making the change they want to see, refugees can use UNHCR's prejudices on gender stereotypes in order to fit into their frame without actually challenging socio-cultural norms.<sup>117</sup> This can also be connected to Olivius as well as Rodon, Serrano, and Giménez research, who argue that humanitarian aid organizations

---

<sup>114</sup> Freedman. Gendered Protection for the 'Victims' of war: Mainstreaming Gender in Refugee Protection. p. 126.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid. p. 128.

<sup>116</sup> Fiddian-Qasmiyeh. "Ideal" Refugee Women and Gender Equality Mainstreaming in the Saharawi Refugee Camps. p. 65.

<sup>117</sup> Grabska. Constructing Modern Gendered Civilized Women and Men: Gender-Mainstreaming in Refugee Camps. p. 88; Hyndman. Refugee Camps as Conflict Zones: The Politics of Gender. p. 200; Rodon; Serrano; Giménez. Managing cultural conflicts for effective humanitarian aid. p. 375.

want their programs to be as effective as possible.<sup>118</sup> Rodon, Serrano, and Giménez argue that programs become more effective if the organization is sensitive to the culture they are working in.<sup>119</sup> Olivius further discusses that humanitarian aid organizations might motivate their gender equality programs by arguing that this improves the efficiency of the program in place. She argues that this is an issue since if the motive to the program is to increase efficiency rather than to improve gender equality, the focus becomes skewed.<sup>120</sup>

This connects to the conclusions on courageous listening made in this study. It was concluded that UNHCR recognizes the importance of courageous listening, but also that they to some extent show signs of being more focused on educating refugees. It was also stated that the success and durability of UNHCR gender work was to have the ability to become a permanent one is dependent on UNHCR's ability to communicate. The findings in this study that touches on the fact that UNHCR works more with education rather than courageous listening is therefore also supported by the previous research presented above.

The analysis does not have the ability to evaluate whether refugees engage in UNHCR's planned activities as a way to receive a better treatment and emergency relief. Rather, the connections possible here is what the previous research might say about the conclusions made in this study. The analysis showed that the change that UNHCR is trying to generate does to some extent tick the majority of the boxes that Ackerly argues is necessary in order to create a lasting change. If the intentions and meaning behind refugees' choice to participate in UNHCR's planned agenda towards gender equality are not with the intent to actually learn and create a more gender equal society the change will not remain permanent. If the intentions are rather to stay on good terms with UNHCR, the door for changes to be reverted after returning home is left open since the social life has not actually been changed, leaving the fabric unchanged at the core.

The next topic aimed to be discussed is that about cultural differences. Ngo and Hansen write that "Ideas about moral right and wrong are context-bound, and therefore may differ from

---

<sup>118</sup> Olivius. *Refugee men as Perpetrators, Allies, or Troublemakers? Emerging Discourses in Men and Masculinities in Humanitarian Aid*. p. 56.; Rodon; Serrano; Giménez. *Managing cultural conflicts for effective humanitarian aid*. p. 375.

<sup>119</sup> Rodon; Serrano; Giménez. *Managing cultural conflicts for effective humanitarian aid*. p. 375.

<sup>120</sup> Olivius. *(Un)Governable Subjects: The Limits of Refugee Participation in the Promotion of Gender Equality in Humanitarian Aid*. p. 58-59.

culture to culture.”<sup>121</sup> Ngo and Hansen also address that UNHCR does not respect that what is considered right or wrong differ from culture to culture and that they therefore “position respect for cultural relativism as a threat to universal human rights.”<sup>122</sup>

This can in some ways be connected to the findings of this study. It was discussed that the work towards gender equality was seen as the rational way for refugees after getting educated on gender equality and becoming agents of change. In accordance with Ngo and Hansen, this can be seen in a way as trying to force a change in gender hierarchies. Ngo and Hansen are not questioning the universality of human rights, but they do pose interesting questions about in what ways change can be promoted.<sup>123</sup> As shown in this study, UNHCR’s engagement to promote gender equality is in line with human rights according to Ackerly’s definition as this would eliminate injustices. It is therefore hard to question UNHCR’s motives behind their work with gender equality. Once again UNHCR’s success in being culturally sensitive whilst still promoting a change is dependent on their ability to run a camp with courageous listening. This ultimately comes down to the balance between promoting human rights and cultural sensitivity, a topic that unfortunately will not be further discussed in this study.

When measuring the success of humanitarian aid, one need to take into consideration both the results from the emergency relief as well as from the development programs. Emergency relief has not been discussed much in this study as the documents examined has its focus on gender equality. From research presented by both Crisp and Audet, it is argued that the progress needs to be reported to donors which is another reason for the importance of getting qualitative results. Crisp and Audet both argues that the focus of the development programs to some extent also needs to be requested by donors.<sup>124</sup> In connection to this study, it was shown that the main terrain of continued dispute was that of gender inequality. Ackerly argues that it is necessary to be attentive to what is being discussed as an issue in order to highlight power imbalances.<sup>125</sup> With the awareness that the UNHCR to some extent is steered

---

<sup>121</sup> Ngo; Hansen. *Constructing Identities in UN Refugee Camps: The Politics of Language, Culture and Humanitarian Assistance*. p. 99.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.* p. 101.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.* p. 100.

<sup>124</sup> Crisp. *Mind the Gap! UNHCR, Humanitarian Assistance and the Development Process*. p. 184; Audet. *From Disaster Relief to Development Assistance: Why Simple Solutions Don't Work*. p. 116.

<sup>125</sup> Ackerly. *Universal Human Rights in a World of Difference*. p. 205.

by the will of donors in mind, it can be questioned whether refugees have a say in what issues is actually discussed and attempted to be resolved. It is also relevant to include research by Anderson who argues that vulnerability is a result of human action.<sup>126</sup> If the UNHCR is to evolve in how to settle struggles with refugees they need to acknowledge the fact that in a refugee camp they have the ability to both strengthen refugees as well as increasing their vulnerability, all depending on which action they take.

What can be questioned in the light of the previous research brought up here is rather how well the UNHCR actually succeed with changing socio-cultural norms and reach a change towards gender equality that will last even when returning home. These documents are produced mainly by and for the UNHCR themselves and might as a result tend to smooth over difficulties, as lifted when the primary material was first introduced in this study. When analyzing these documents and connecting these findings with Ackerly's theory on human rights, it was shown that UNHCR in theory seem to have thought through their means of promoting a change that has the possibility to last. Previous research brought up in this section however show that there may be a lot more difficulties in promoting gender equality in refugee camps than the analysis and the primary material let on.

---

<sup>126</sup> Anderson. Understanding the Disaster-Development Continuum: Gender Analysis Is the Essential Tool. s. 8.



## 7 Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of UNHCR's gender perception by examining recent documents produced by UNHCR on the topic of gender equality. By doing this the aim was to further expand on the understanding of how gender is understood in refugee communities and how UNHCR aims to tackle gender inequalities in refugee camps. The findings were compared with Ackerly's immanent theory on human rights in order to see whether UNHCR promotes ways to address the issue of gender inequality in refugee camps in a way that has the ability to cause a permanent change.

The prime material used in this study was two relatively recent official documents produced by and for UNHCR's staff. One of the documents was a review, which discussed the progress of gender equality programs in the recent year and also lifted areas of improvement for the following years. The other document was a policy that acts as a guideline for how staff is supposed to act when working with gender equality in the coming years. The method used to analyze these documents was the ideology criticism as designed by Bergström and Boréus. This was all used together with the immanent theory on human rights as constructed by Ackerly. The research question was as follows:

- 1. How does UNHCR's approach on how to reach gender equality have the possibility to create a permanent change in accordance with Ackerly's theory on human rights?*

From the analysis, it was concluded that the documents portray that UNHCR to some extent does have a way to create lasting changes towards gender equality in refugee communities. It was concluded that UNHCR's focus in future work should be on finding new ways to improve on courageous listening. The analysis suggested that refugee women is seen as someone more important to listen to, whilst refugee men is someone who needs to receive education. This was discussed further by suggesting that this rather shows signs of UNHCR maybe being too rigid in their agenda, and therefore not completely adapting the term courageous listening, whilst at the same time acknowledging its importance.

Finally, it was also suggested that what happens after refugees return home is going to vary from time to time. This was connected to Ackerly's statement that the change needs to be rooted in all areas of life, or the fabric as she calls it, in order for it to become a permanent one. In other words, change needs to be rooted within the political, social and economic aspects of society. When refugees have the possibility to return home, areas of life change and the work towards gender equality can go undone. Whether a change will be permanent or not is dependent on how well this policy is applied in the field as well as the refugee's willingness to adapt a gender equal way of life.

## References

- Ackerly, Brooke A. Feminist Curb Cuts & Critical Theory for Democratic and Human Rights Theories. *Conference Papers -- American Political Science Association*. August 2003.
- Ackerly, Brooke A. *Universal Human Rights in a World of Difference*. Cambridge: Cambridge university press, 2008.
- Anderson, Mary B. Understanding the Disaster-Development Continuum: Gender Analysis Is the Essential Tool. *Focus on Gender: Women and Emergencies*. Vol. 2, No. 1. February 1994. p. 7-10.
- Audet, François. From Disaster Relief to Development Assistance: Why Simple Solutions Don't Work. *International Journal*, vol. 70, no. 1. 2015. p. 110-118.
- Bergström, Göran; Boréus, Karin. Idé- och ideologianalys. In Bergström, Göran; Boréus, Karin (eds.). *Textens Mening och Makt: Metodbok i Samhällsvetenskaplig text- och diskursanalys*. Third Edition. Lund: Studentlitteratur AB. 2012. p. 139-176.
- Bickford, Susan. *The Dissonance of Democracy: Listening, Conflict and Citizenship*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996. p. 153.
- Crisp, Jeffery. Mind the Gap! UNHCR, Humanitarian Assistance and the Development Process. *The International Migration Review*. Vol. 35. No. 1. Special Issue: UNHCR at 50: Past, Present and Future of Refugee Assistance. 2001. p. 168-191.
- Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, Elena. "Ideal" Refugee Women and Gender Equality Mainstreaming in the Saharawi Refugee Camps: "Good Practice" For Whom? *Refugee Survey Quarterly*. Vol. 29. No. 2. 2010. p. 64-84.
- Freedman, Jane. A. Gendered Protection for the 'Victims' of war: Mainstreaming Gender in Refugee Protection. In *Making Gender, Making War: Violence, Military and Peacekeeping Practices*, Kronsell, Annica (ed); Svedberg, Erika (ed). Routledge. New York. 2012. p. 121-134.
- Grabska, Katarzyna. Constructing Modern Gendered Civilized Women and Men: Gender-Mainstreaming in Refugee Camps. *Gender and Development*. Routledge Publishing. Vol. 19. No.1. 2011. p. 81-93.

- Hyndman, Jennifer. Refugee Camps as Conflict Zones: The Politics of Gender. In Giles, Wenona & Hyndman, Jennifer (eds.). *Sites of Violence: Gender and Conflict Zones*. University of California Press. Los Angeles. 2004. p. 193-212.
- Juan, Rodon N; Maria Serrano, Josep F; Cristina Giménez. Managing cultural conflicts for effective humanitarian aid. *Int. J. Production Economics*. Vol. 139. 2012. p. 366-376.
- Moore, Jonathan. The humanitarian-development gap. *International Review of Red Cross*. Vol. 81. No. 833. 1999. p. 103-108.
- Ngo, Bic; Hansen, Sarah. Constructing Identities in UN Refugee Camps: The Politics of Language, Culture and Humanitarian Assistance. *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies*. No. 10, Vol. 2. 2013. p. 97-120.
- Olivius, Elisabeth. Constructing Humanitarian Selves and Refugee Others. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*. Vol. 18. No. 2. 2016. p. 270-290.
- Olivius, Elisabeth. Refugee men as Perpetrators, Allies, or Troublemakers? Emerging Discourses in Men and Masculinities in Humanitarian Aid. *Women's Studies International Forum*. Vol. 56. 2016. p. 56-65.
- Olivius, Elisabeth. (Un)Governable Subjects: The Limits of Refugee Participation in the Promotion of Gender Equality in Humanitarian Aid. *Journal of Refugee Studies*. Vol. 27. No. 1. 2013. p. 42-61.
- Oxford dictionary. [website]. <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/culture> (accessible 2020-05-22)
- UNHCR. A new deal for refugees. UNHCR. [website]. <https://www.unhcr.org/a-new-deal-for-refugees.html?query=self%20reliant> (accessible 2020-05-22)
- UNHCR, Inter-Agency Standing Committee. *Gender Handbook in Humanitarian Action*. December 2006. <https://www.unhcr.org/protection/women/50f91c999/iasc-gender-handbook-humanitarian-action.html?query=gender> (accessible 2020-05-22)
- UNHCR. *UNHCR Policy on Age, Gender and Diversity*. 2018. <https://www.unhcr.org/protection/women/5aa13c0c7/policy-age-gender-diversity-accountability-2018.html?query=policy%20gender> (accessible 2020-05-22)

UNHCR. *UNHCR Review of Gender Equality in Operations*. 2016.  
<https://www.unhcr.org/protection/women/57f3b9a74/unhcr-review-gender-equality-operations-2016.html?query=policy%20gender> (accessible 2020-05-22)

Vanderbilt University. [website] <https://www.vanderbilt.edu/political-science/bio/brooke-ackerly> (accessible 2020-05-23)