Empowered Aid Lebanon – Food Distribution Pilot 2

Summary Report

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Introduction

Empowered Aid: Transforming Gender & Power Dynamics in Aid Distribution is a three year project that aims to reduce the risks that may lead to sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) in aid distributions. The project utilizes participatory action research methods to engage women and girls throughout, and apply their knowledge on how to better understand and prevent SEA. In the first year of Empowered Aid, the Global Women's Institute (GWI) and the CARE International in Lebanon worked with Syrian refugee women and girls to document SEA risks when accessing food, WASH, shelter, and cash assistance, and share recommendations on how to improve their safety and reduce feelings of fear in aid distribution processes.[1]

In the second phase of Empowered Aid, GWI is working with the NGOs CARE and URDA, to adapt distribution monitoring tools that more proactively identify and address risks for sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA). These tools build on the findings from Empowered Aid's first phase, which identified ways in which the distribution processes can put women and girls at risk of SEA, and how to mitigate those risks.

Individual monitoring reports are also available for each of the tools used in the food pilot:

- Safety audits;
- Household survey
- Point of distribution questionnaire on COVID-19-related safety and risk;

These reports include detailed methodology on how each tool and the research team was prepared for data collection. Contact Loujinefattal (at) careliban.org or APotts (at) gwu.edu for more information. https: //globalwomensinstitute.gwu.edu/empowered-aid.

[1] For more information about Empowered Aid, visit https://globalwomensinstitute.gwu.edu/empowered-aid. Findings from the first phase in Uganda can be found in the report online here: https://globalwomensinstitute.gwu.edu/empowered-aid-resources.

Overview of the Distribution and Methodology

In May 2020, URDA, CARE Lebanon, and the Global Women's Institute distributed 500 food parcels to a targeted group of Syrian refugees who met UNHCR vulnerability criteria. This not only supported needs identified by the humanitarian response but was also part of Empowered Aid's efforts to reduce sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) in aid distributions by identifying risk factors (Phase 1) and building evidence on safer distribution mechanisms and monitoring (Phase 2).

Specifically, this food distribution was designed using recommendations made by Syrian refugee women and girls during Phase I of the Empowered Aid study, in which they described the SEA risks they face when accessing distributions and ways to minimize these risks. With the onset of COVID-19, the research team expanded the distribution design and monitoring to better capture the pandemic's effects on women and girls' access to information, concerns related to SEA and other forms of violence, and knowledge of reporting mechanisms and services—at a time when refugee communities had few other avenues for communicating this information with aid actors. The research team decided to move forward with plans to distribute food parcels despite the inability to collect all the data intended, in order to prioritize providing assistance amidst the pandemic and economic crisis. Accountability to women, girls, and other refugee community members was ensure through a lighter-touch distribution monitoring plan: FGDs were dropped due to COVID-19 regulations, and the team shortened the household survey as well as conducted it over the phone. The safety audit, an observational tool, allowed for safe data collection. The team also created the "point of distribution questionnaire" (PODQ) to ensure women and girls—especially those without access to phones or other mobile services—were able to provide feedback in-person, while minimizing interaction time.

The food parcel distribution took place in two informal settlements (IS)[2] in Sahel Akkar (251 families) and Mhammra Akkar (250 families), and applied two different distribution modalities recommended in the first phase of Empowered Aid. In Sahel Akkar, aid recipients were organized to arrive in small groups of 20 people at a time, at pre-assigned times. In Mhammra Akkar (managed by URDA), items were distributed directly to recipients' homes through a "door-to-door" process. Both of these modalities coincidentally aligned with COVID-19 health and safety restrictions. It is important to note that, given the context of COVID-19, some of the challenges reported in distribution monitoring may reflect the strict conditions of Lebanon's 'general mobilization state' (put in place to limit the spread of COVID-19) rather than challenges specific to the distribution being monitored.

LEARNING SPOTLIGHT: COVID-19 Adaptations to Monitoring SEA in humanitarian aid distributions

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic when data collection was about to begin, the research team developed a short point of distribution questionnaire to ask questions on safety and risk related to the COVID-19 pandemic and response. The questionnaire was administered to women respondents covering six main areas on women's experiences in relation to distributions, particularly in context of the COVID-19 pandemic: information and communication on distributions, feelings of fear during the distribution process, SEA risk during aid distribution, other types of violence linked to the COVID-19 pandemic, places to report complaints or obtain support, and safety measures observed at distributions.

[2] Throughout this report, we will use the term informal settlement or "IS" to refer to any type of informal settlement or informal camp setting where refugees in Lebanon are living.

Table 1. Food Distribution Summary			
Type of distribution being piloted	Targeted, Pre-assigned times Distribution (Adapted Modality)	Door-to-Door Distribution (Adapted Modality)	
Location of distribution	Sahel Akkar Informal Settlement (IS), unmanaged	Mhammra Akkar Informal Settlement (IS), managed by URDA	
Date of distribution	05 May 2020	05 May 2020	
# of people reached	251 (102 women, 149 men)	250 (218 women, 32 men)	
Distribution Monitoring Conducted	2 Observational Safety Audits	2 Observational Safety Audits	05 May 2020
	5 (5% of women) Point of Distribution Questionnaires (PODQ)	33 (15% of women) Point of Distribution Questionnaires (PODQ)	05 May 2020
	65 (26% of total recipients) Phone Household Survey (HHS) Interviews Post-Distribution	88 (35% of total recipients) Phone Household Survey (HHS) Interviews Post-Distribution	15 June – 15 July 2020
COVID-19 situation	during COVID-19	During COVID-19	

Reducing SEA Risk at Distributions: Analysis of Feasibility, Acceptability and EffectivenessTo better understand the feasibility, acceptability, and effectiveness of the adapted distribution model, we analyzed data from across the three types of post-distribution monitoring conducted. Results are summarized here, as well as details on how well the adapted monitoring tools developed by Empowered Aid were able to capture women and girls' perceptions of safety and risk in relation to SEA, GBV, and accessing food aid.

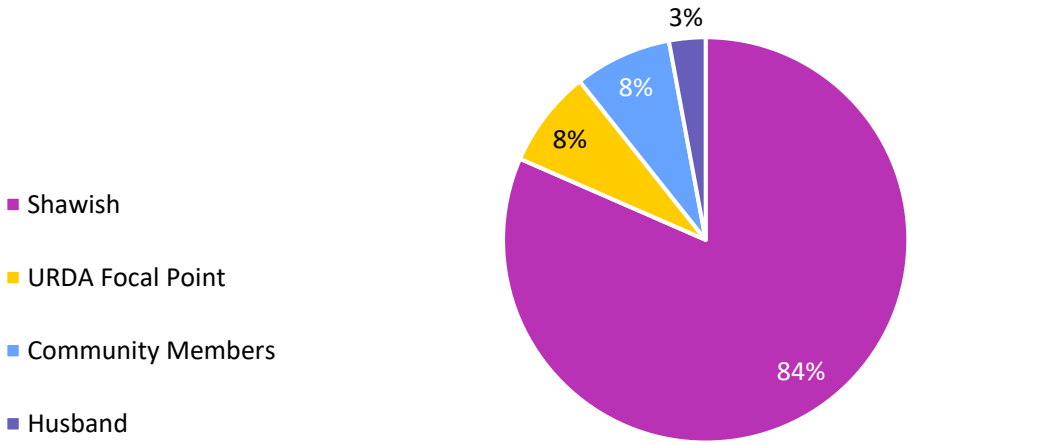
Feasibility of the adapted distribution model

GWI, CARE, and URDA applied two of the key recommendations made by women and girls in Empowered Aid's first phase: arranging small groups of aid recipients to come to the distribution site at pre-assigned times and conducting a second distribution through door-to-door drop off of food packages. First, the research team brought together key stakeholders involved in the project to plan and ensure investment amongst senior leadership from both organizations. Prior to the distribution, trainings were held on PSEA and GBV core concepts with all the research and data collection teams, followed by trainings on the adapted tools.

Findings from the household survey indicate that both modalities were feasible to execute, even during COVID-19. In comparison to a 'normal' or non-adapted distribution, fewer logistical resources, such as

transportation and venue rental, were required in the door-to-door distribution. Challenges associated with travel to and from the distribution point were also reduced. Given the circumstances of COVID-19, the door-to-door distribution was preferable to some to meet social distancing and non-congregant requirements in Lebanon. PODQ and safety audit findings indicate that spreading information about an upcoming pre-assigned-times or door-to-door distribution was feasible in the context of an informal settlement – though information-sharing occurred primarily through the *Shawish*, or the appointed community leader of the informal settlement who is typically a man, and therefore did not adequately account for potential risk. The below figures showcases the importance of the *Shawish* in delivering information, as 84% of respondents from both informal settlements where the distributions took place identified the *Shawish* as how they find out about distributions.

Figure 1: Sources of information on distributions identified by women (n=38)



Source: PODQ

Acceptability of the adapted distribution model

Respondents from the household survey reported high satisfaction from both distribution modalities (82%), with the pre-assigned times distribution reported slightly higher levels of satisfaction than the door-to-door distribution (82% and 77% respectively), although these results were not statistically significant. Among the respondents that were less than completely satisfied, the top five aspects of the distribution that respondents said they were not completely satisfied with included: information about eligibility for the distribution (9%), treatment by staff or volunteers at the distribution point (8%), waiting

"The door-to-door modality was very useful, especially for women, as they do not have to leave their tents" – Syrian woman living in Lebanon as a refugee

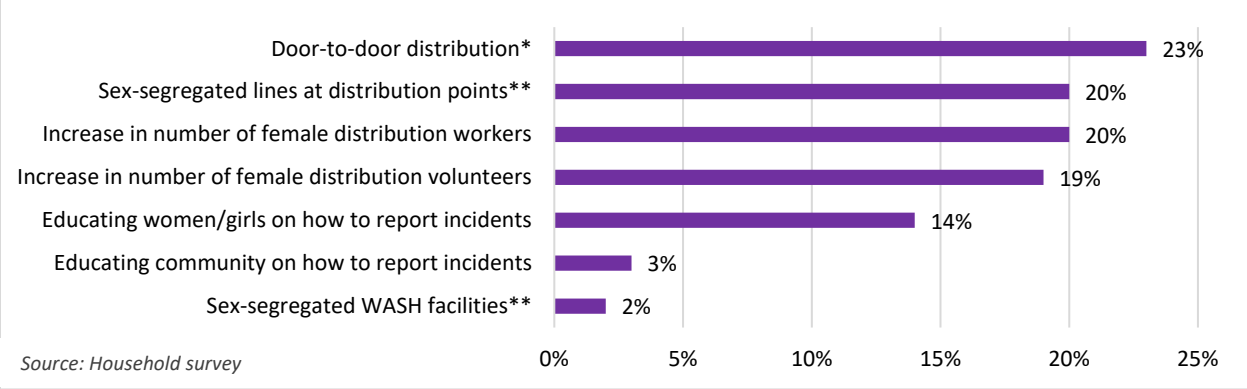
conditions at the pre-assigned times distribution (5%), information about contents of the food parcel (5%), and the schedule or hours of the distribution (3%).

Effectiveness of adapted distribution model at increasing women and girls' safety

Within Empowered Aid's objectives, effectiveness refers to whether the adapted distribution modality results in the target group (women and girls) reporting greater perceived safety, and/or lower perceived risk, when accessing aid. Within this food pilot, the post-distribution monitoring tools were adapted to measure women and girls' perceptions of SEA risk at the distribution sites, and whether the adapted model – small groups attending at pre-assigned times and door-to-door distributions – would impact feelings of safety. Household survey and point of distribution questionnaire respondents found both adapted distributions to be generally safe for women and girls, and findings from both tools also suggested that female and male respondents found the door-to-door distribution to be a good safety measure to prevent risk for women and girls during aid distributions.

Other safety measures observed to help minimize risk included: sex-segregated lines (pre-assigned times distribution only) (20%), increase in the number of female distribution workers (20%), increase in the number of female distribution volunteers (19%), educating women/girls on how to report an incident (14%), educating community members on how to report an incident (3%), sex-segregated WASH facilities (pre-assigned times distribution only) (2%). Below, in Figure 2, are some of the observed safety measures identified by respondents of the household survey.

Figure 2: Safety measures recipients observed at aid distributions that help minimize SEA risks



*Only applies to the door-to-door modality; **Only applies to the pre-assigned times distribution
Note: all percents are valid percents.

Female respondents prioritized sex-segregated lines, female distribution workers, safe transport to/from distributions, educating women/girls on how to report incidents as measures that should be implemented to make women and girls feel safe at distributions going forward.

"We as women felt comfortable because staying in our tent protect us from various difficulties including holding heavy boxes or being exploited from taxi drivers." – Syrian woman living in Lebanon as a refugee

"I don't leave the camp [ITS] unless for emergencies. The distributions happen inside the camp and here I feel safe all the time." – Syrian woman living in Lebanon as a refugee

The safety audits found it was feasible to implement most safety measures recommended during both distribution modalities, such as clear methods for handling complaints, appropriate behavior of staff or volunteers, and timely information communication on distributions that reached all audiences. More safety measures were observed to have been met at the door-to-door distribution than the pre-assigned times distribution. However, the lack of certain safety measures had less to do with the modality and more with the varying environments in Lebanon at which distributions are held. For example, lack of permanent structures to protect aid recipients from bad weather created over-crowding when wind and rain occurred at the distribution; lack of visibility for handwashing stations and latrines and poor lighting inside the distribution site and latrines were also issues reported in the safety audits. Therefore, distribution teams in Lebanon must pre-plan around how to potentially improve or augment some of these locations to mitigate potential SEA and other GBV risk when they act as distribution sites. The safety audit findings also illustrate the importance of distribution monitoring tools such as these observational audits, and their use during a crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic. While the research and data collection teams may not be able interact for long periods with aid recipients, safety audits and other observational tools can be utilized to ensure accountability and proactively respond to SEA risk in monitoring and evaluation activities.

The feelings of satisfaction expressed at the adapted distributions and the SEA mitigation measures observed in the household survey, in combination with the feasibility of carrying out these adapted models while executing most safety measures as observed during the safety audit, indicate that CARE, URDA and other NGOs could feasibly increase satisfaction and feelings of safety at distributions by utilizing a door-to-door distribution modality (preferred) or a pre-assigned times distribution modality.

Post-distribution monitoring tools and their ability to better capture women and girls' perceptions of risk and safety in relation to SEA and other forms of GBV

The next section reviews the ability of the adapted post-distribution monitoring tools to capture perceptions of SEA and other forms of GBV risks amongst women and girls. Three main findings emerged from the analysis: (1) that the tools capture SEA risk in the aid distribution process; (2) where women and girls go to access reporting mechanisms and services; and (3) what other types of gender-based violence or abuse women may experience due to distributions that may be linked to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Women expressed that they had seen or heard of SEA surrounding the aid distribution in the PODQ

According to the point of distribution questionnaire 11% (4) of women respondents expressed that they had seen or heard of SEA in their communities. Of these, 3 out of 4 said SEA risk occurred in relation to aid, outside the informal settlements, and with aid workers as perpetrators. This tool proved to best capture SEA related risks in aid distribution.

"Yes, I heard about that [SEA] but outside this camp [ITS]. No one [does] a good thing unless there is something in return…" – Syrian woman living in Lebanon as a refugee

"… Some widows who have children find themselves forced to give their phone numbers to the NGO workers who ask them to go for a date with them in exchange for the assistance. Usually, the worker asks the woman to be in a relationship with him in exchange for the aid." – Syrian woman living in Lebanon as a refugee

"Yes, I heard many stories about this [SEA]. During the registration workers ask women to go on a date with them in exchange for the assistance." – Syrian woman living in Lebanon as a refugee

The research team was unable to complete focus group discussions as we had planned due to COVID-19, but a sister study in Uganda found focus group discussion to be a good tool for capturing SEA related risk as well.[3] SEA mitigation measures were well captured in the safety audit and household survey tools, but do not directly ask about SEA amongst aid recipients. As an example of how the monitoring data generated by this suite of tools complements each other and informs action: information from the survey and point of distribution questionnaire about where women and girls felt unsafe in the distribution process can be used to better target where in the process SEA mitigation measures should be implemented.

The household survey captured perception of safety or fear surrounding aid distribution at low rates, and did not capture any SEA risks (respondents reporting that they had seen or heard of SEA in their community), likely due to sensitivity of the topic and the changed nature of the household survey as a telephone interview. The household survey was not designed to capture rates of SEA as specialized surveys are required to measure the prevalence of violence. However, it did capture a variety of SEA-related risks and some reports of abuse, which were safely referred to a social worker for follow-up.

Due to COVID-19, the survey tool was adapted from an in-person household survey to one conducted by telephone. This necessitated shortening the survey time and the team also noted several specific challenges related to administering the phone survey, including loss to follow up due to: deactivated lines due to lack of financial means and access to livelihood opportunities; secondary movement; and, unwillingness to speak (particularly about sensitive issues) due to lack of privacy when using the family telephone.

[3] For more on Empowered Aid Uganda's pilot reports, reference the contacts on the first page of the report or visit https://globalwomensinstitute.gwu.edu/empowered-aid-resources.

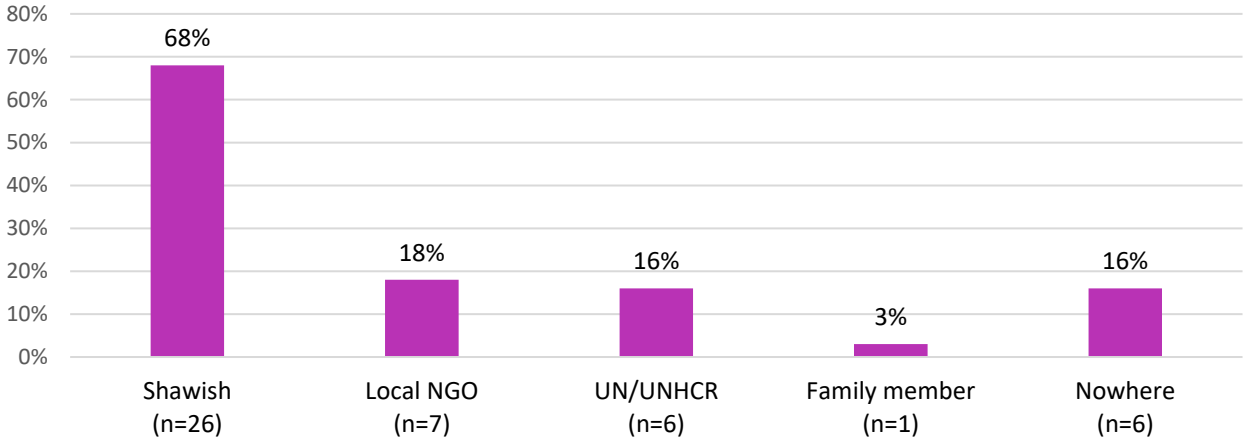
Understanding where, how, and if women and girls access reporting mechanisms and services

The point of distribution questionnaire and safety audit tools also proved to be very effective in capturing where or to whom aid recipients could go to report complaints or access services, as well as why they would not report complaints. The vast majority (68%) of respondents of the PODQ identified the *Shawish* as where they could go to report a complaint or seek support. This can be concerning when multiple outlets for reporting are not available, such as women's or community organizations, hotlines, complaints desks, etc.

"I only tell the Shawish…I don't complain to UNHCR, they say that they are not responsible to help us." – Syrian woman living in Lebanon as a refugee

Other places respondents said they could report complaints and obtain support included reporting to local NGOs, UN/UNHCR, and family members. Additionally in the PODQ, 16% (6) of respondents said they would not report to anyone and preferred to remain silent. Of those respondents who commented on the quality of the support they received after reporting, 57% (7) reported that the service provider gave no answer and/or took no action after the complaint was filed. 57% (7) also reported a lack of trust in the service provider due to a negative past experience or response.

Figure 3: Where women could report a complaint, give feedback, or obtain support (n=38)



Multiple responses possible from same respondent

Source: PODQ

The Safety Audits pointed to a clear method for handling complaints and visibility materials for complaint mechanisms at both the pre-assigned times and door-to-door distributions. Like the PODQ, the Safety Audit also observed that the *Shawish* was the main method of handling complaints for aid recipients in the informal settlements. Additionally, aid recipients approached one safety auditor to express frustration about where to submit a complaint. A leaflet with information on complaint submission was shared, in addition to hotlines for PSEA-related complaints (all in Arabic).

This data on reporting mechanisms and services captured by the adapted tools is critical in supporting SEA and GBV survivors in accessing services and reporting mechanisms in a safe and comfortable manner that centers them in the process, and ensures that community stakeholders like the *Shawish* have the resources and knowledge they need to support survivors and have been trained on PSEA.

Other types of gender-based violence or abuse related to COVID-19 or reported as increasing due to the pandemic

The point of distribution questionnaire represented an opportunity to quickly and safely capture feedback from women and girls on how COVID-19 impacted their access to distributions, as well as any new or changing risks related to gender-based violence and sexual exploitation and abuse.

No instances of non-SEA types of violence, including COVID-19 related violence, were reported in the household survey, the point of distribution questionnaire (though this question was only asked in the unmanaged IS), or the observed during the Safety Audit. The lack of reporting in the household survey on experiences of non-SEA types of violence were likely related to the phone-based nature of the survey due to COVID-19. The data was not collected during the PODQ in the managed IS due to time constraints, and while it was asked in the unmanaged IS, data collectors observed that respondents wanted to rush through the questions and leave as quickly as possible, which could have affected their responses. One fight between two male aid recipients was observed via the safety audit, but was not clearly related to distribution design or gender-based.

Despite the constraints of COVID-19 on data collection in order to prioritize aid delivery to communities in need, the research team in Lebanon was able to capture actionable information on GBV/SEA safety and risk, during a time when many mechanisms of community feedback and complaint are cut-off. The supplement of the short point of distribution questionnaire for the food pilot helped to collect more robust data on safety and risk as the phone survey tended to be more limiting (versus an in-person interview). Additionally, this report showcases how the adaptations and tools can be further applied by aid organizations in Lebanon to better capture and mitigate SEA risks in aid distribution. Hopefully in future, less constrained circumstances, CARE, URDA and other aid organizations can utilize the toolkit to collect a robust set of data that can further close gaps that expose women and girls to SEA and create safer programming.

Recommendations

Based on the findings from the post-distribution monitoring data collected, below are recommendations for CARE Lebanon and URDA to improve the safety of women and adolescent girls at distribution sites. These can also be adapted by other NGOs and humanitarian actors at a wide range of distributions throughout Lebanon.

1. **Utilize the adapted distribution modalities—providing aid to small groups of recipients at pre-assigned times, or door-to-door—to increase feelings of safety in aid distribution.** The satisfaction levels for both modalities and other SEA mitigation measures applied point to the possibility of increasing feelings of safety and satisfaction by using these methods. **Mixed-gender or female teams**

can reduce risk to women and girls and are their stated preferred, and were noted as especially important when aid is delivered at household level. To further increase safety, reinforce the presence of female distribution workers and volunteers who can be approached for complaints and/or raise awareness on how to report an incident. Additionally, when scheduling the door-to-door distributions, ensure recipients are aware of the schedule of the distribution, and call ahead to alert them that a distribution team is on its way. If it is necessary to meet outside the home for any reason, ensure the meeting point is nearby and easy to reach, is in a safe location, and can avoid stigma of being seen receiving aid in a public location if this is a concern.

2. **Utilize the Empowered Aid toolkit to better capture women and girls' safety and risks in food aid distribution through use of the adapted distribution monitoring tools—i.e., the safety audit, point-of-distribution questionnaire, post-distribution survey and focus group guide.** These tools improved data collection on women and girls' safety and risk in the distribution process, as well as men and boys' concerns and recommendations. By using the adapted tools, food and other aid actors can better identify these risks and mitigate them in future distributions and programming. By understanding the ways women and girls are exposed to SEA throughout the distribution process, and collecting routine monitoring data on this, aid actors can track how risks evolve as well as how effective their risk mitigation measures are, and where improvements or adjustments are needed. This will help all distribution actors take a more proactive role in better preventing known risks from happening in the first place.

3. **In these and many other informal settlements in Lebanon, the *Shawish*—local leaders who already hold a great deal of power within aid systems—served as the main source of both information about how to receive aid, and about complaint mechanisms or services if someone has been abused, exploited or otherwise. Information is power and ensuring that power is not concentrated only in the hands of a few is an important part of SEA risk mitigation.** URDA and CARE, along with women's organizations active in these areas, should work to establish multiple, varied methods for information on aid distributions and SEA/protection reporting in these informal settlements, such as through women's or community organizations, hotlines, and (mobile) helpdesks. For future distributions, information should be communicated via multiple channels, particularly those women and girls noted to be most useful (i.e., via community mobilization).

4. **SEA risk is recognized and observed in these ISs, often in relation to aid, and is perpetrated by aid workers, yet complaints and response mechanisms are not reported or used.** As stated in the PODQ findings, over 1 in 10 respondents said they had seen or heard of SEA in their communities. URDA, CARE, UNHCR, and community actors should work with women's organizations and community-based organizations to hold awareness and information sessions on what mechanisms exist to address SEA and ensure that residents of both managed and unmanaged informal settlements are able to access them. Again, multiple methods should be available and accessible for these populations, especially considering COVID-19 restrictions that make travel more difficult. Ensuring women and girls, PSNs, and the broader community know how to report incidents and have accessible means to do so (including and beyond hotlines) is vital. Conducting awareness raising on reporting and complaint mechanisms *during* distributions is also useful, for example when mobilizing, during the pre-address, or while aid recipients are waiting to receive their items. This can be done through visual materials, and gender and protection staff should always be present to receive complaints and provide referrals.

5. **Continue to utilize sex-segregated lines at distributions and ensure sex-segregated latrines and WASH facilities are available**. Women and girls involved in Empowered Aid's Phase 1 and other distribution pilots have reported that these two measures increase their safety and reduce the risk of SEA or other forms of gender-based violence while at distributions. Designing **lockable, lighted and gender-identifiable toilet facilities** in a location that is accessible during the day and night is central to eliminating protection threats for women and children. When planning distributions, the team should take into consideration the planned distribution site(s) and any constraints – such as lack of visible signs for handwashing stations or latrines – and prepare ways to improve or augment the environment (for example, by bringing signage).

6. **Implement other safety measures that women, girls, and other community members have recommended as increasing their safety at distributions, but which have not been widely observed.** Based on Empowered Aid's findings from Phase 1 and the Phase 2 pilots conducted by the research team, this includes increasing the proportion of female aid workers and volunteers present, awareness raising on incident reporting mechanisms, distributing aid items door-to-door or to small groups at a time, and providing transport and/or accompaniment support while traveling. Safety measures that teams have observed occurring already in aid distribution processes include sex-segregated lines and some increase in the number of female staff and volunteers at distributions.

7. Building on one of the most-requested, yet challenging to implement recommendations above: **Talk with women and girls to support gendered needs around safely traveling to and from distribution points & transporting aid.** Women report feeling unsafe traveling to/from distribution sites because this presents risk factors for sexual harassment or abuse, particularly related to taxis. *Conducting door-to-door distribution will mitigate this risk, or supporting women and girls to be accompanied on the way to/from distributions.*