



# After The Rains Came

Meeting the needs of women and the  
most vulnerable in Sierra Leone



Australia Assists - an integrated deployable civilian capability that builds on the strengths of the Australian Civilian Corps (ACC) and the humanitarian response roster of **RedR Australia**. Collaboratively, **RedR Australia** and the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) have co-designed the new integrated civilian capability that will encompass the whole disaster cycle.

Australia Assists gives highly skilled humanitarian experts the opportunity to make a real difference and build the resilience of the world's most vulnerable before, during and after disaster or conflict.

Interview with: **RedR Roster Member and Australia Assists deployee, Jean-Noel Melotte, Humanitarian Recovery Specialist**

Deployed to: **UN Women, Sierra Leone**

Response: **Flooding and mudslide disaster**

From: **Oct 2017 – Jan 2018 (three months)**

### What happened in Sierra Leone in August 2017?

On 14th August 2017, a large cross-section of Freetown was devastated due to a landslide and flooding. Out of an estimated 6,000 people impacted, 1,141 were declared missing or lost their lives and an additional 3,000 people were displaced, having lost their homes. Almost every sector of the economy was impacted by the disaster. Housing, health and the social protection sector suffered visible impacts, accounting for 80% of total damage. The disaster largely impacted the livelihoods of communities in and around Freetown City. Differential impact could be seen from the landslide and subsequent debris flow along the Babadorie River Valley from flooding in other valleys across Freetown City.

### Why is it important to consider gender issues in early recovery?

Gender shapes the disaster experience and the ability to recover differently for different people. Recognising the gendered impact of disaster helps us understand the reasons why certain groups of people are at greater risk or why others recover at a slower pace. Since gendered norms attach different roles and responsibilities within population groups, it also impacts their access and control of scarce resources. Identifying gender concerns and sensitivity is an important aspect of national policy and practice during disasters and throughout the rehabilitation, recovery and reconstruction process. (International Recovery Platform).

**“ Gender shapes the disaster experience and the ability to recover differently for different people ”**

### → Key lessons learned:

- Gender and other vulnerabilities need to be considered from the initial phase of a response, especially during needs assessments;
- Longer term recovery should be informed by active participation of vulnerable groups;
- Capacity building with host agencies needs to consider government and civil society actors' capacity on gender awareness to strengthen responses and preparedness

## What was the role of RedR Australia and UN Women?

In June 2016, RedR Australia signed an agreement with UN Women under the United Nations Standby Partnership. Since then RedR has supported the work of UN Women in different capacities around the world. One such deployment was in response to the flooding in Sierra Leone. RedR deployed me as a Humanitarian Recovery Specialist. I was responsible for providing advice, guidance and support to ensure the formulation and integration of gender sensitive UN Women humanitarian response activities in the emergency and recovery stages.

**“ My first priority was to make sure that the needs of women and the most vulnerable people were considered ”**

## What was the situation when you arrived in Sierra Leone and started working with UN Women?

When I first arrived in Sierra Leone it had already been almost three months since the disaster happened so they were well into the recovery phase. The registration of Internally Displaced People (IDPs) was ongoing three months after the event. The reason for this protracted registration exercise was the lack of a clear definition/criteria around affected people.

It was decided early on that not only would people directly affected by the mudslide be targeted, but also flood-affected people. Flooding regularly occurs on a yearly basis in Freetown, but the level of assistance varies depending on international aid programs, so the landslide created a new dynamic.

On my arrival, the response should have been almost mid-way into the recovery phase but ongoing challenges in developing a clear beneficiary list increased the length of the relief phase. My first priority was to make sure that the needs of women and the most vulnerable people were being considered. It became apparent that there was a lack of coordination on gender needs and vulnerabilities in the response.

## What were the biggest gaps and opportunities you identified during your deployment, especially in the initial phase?

On my first analysis, I identified that the greatest challenge for developing effective programs was the lack of clear definition of who was considered an 'affected person'. There were political considerations and sensitivities with an election looming (which has since taken place) and the idea of excluding any affected people was not politically acceptable. This setup caused a lack of clarity to inform how to prioritize humanitarian aid and complicated delivery.

Through direct interviews with agencies and organizations involved in the response I was able to gain a general sense about what efforts were being made to address the needs of vulnerable groups and who were their targeted beneficiaries. This information gathering allowed me to create a cohesive list of their various activities. Through this effort we gained more clarity on gaps in the response and created a joint platform between UN agencies and INGOs on protection. This common feedback loop provided the grounds to build one voice to government partners that included the views of the most relevant government agencies.

## What were the key challenges that you identified from your deployment with UN Women?

This kind of deployment is essential for ensuring cross cutting issues are considered and is more effective if applied early on in the response. I feel that if this position had been rolled out earlier in the response they would have been able to identify issues a lot more proactively and develop solutions to benefit the most vulnerable people. Instead, we were trying to address those cases in an ad-hoc way.





## If you had to prioritise, what are the most important lessons to remember going forward?

I think the initial needs assessment needs to provide leadership to agencies and government partners so they can easily build into their initial questionnaire a customized definition for context-specific vulnerability criteria. It is important to have some sort of standardised questionnaire that could be bolted onto their initial needs assessment and provide a focus on protection.

I think there is a need to involve someone who's looking at recovery earlier on in the planning process, with a specific focus on recovery needs of women and other highly vulnerable groups. By the time I arrived it was a challenge to do this effectively.

The final priority would be to consider how to build capacity beyond government partners. In this particular situation, a complicating factor was that government partners were working amidst an election campaign. When we are talking about capacity building, we need to look at civil society and how we can create a stronger connection with them. Civil societies are the only ones that actually remain and act as the glue between our short-term intervention and leveraging this knowledge to build agency at the community level. Some of them have different levels of efficiency or some of them have different levels of capacity in terms of delivering programs effectively.

Interview by Marco La Rocca  
RedR Australia

As a member of the UN Standby Partnership, RedR Australia would like to acknowledge our United Nations partners:



Photo credits: RedR Australia, UN Women, UNFPA

**“ MR MELOTTE’S CONTRIBUTION STRENGTHENED BOTH UN WOMEN’S AND OUR IMPLEMENTING PARTNER’S CAPACITIES TO RESPOND TO HUMANITARIAN EMERGENCIES SYSTEMATICALLY, INCORPORATING A GENDER PERSPECTIVE. HE DEVELOPED TOOLS INCLUDING CUSTOMISED APPS FOR DATA COLLECTION. HIS ‘AFTER-RESPONSE REVIEW (ARR) REPORT’ NOW SERVES AS A BASELINE FOR THE ARR PROCESS OF THE UN COUNTRY TEAM IN SIERRA LEONE. ”**

INPUT FROM JEAN NOEL’S SUPERVISOR (TAKEN FROM THE PERFORMANCE EVALUATION REPORT)



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