Why does dignity matter?

Females of all ages were vulnerable before the earthquake - and therefore must be prioritized in the response. As humanitarian actors, we have a responsibility to identify protection needs of communities – and to deliver our support to those who are most at need.

In the aftermath of the earthquake, women and girls need basic items in order to interact comfortably in public. They also need access to personal hygiene – particularly menstrual hygiene. Without access to culturally-appropriate clothing and hygiene items, the mobility of women and girls is restricted. And their health is compromised. As a result, they are unable to seek basic services – including humanitarian aid. Preserving dignity is essential to self-esteem and confidence – and critical to protection. Therefore, female dignity is a core aspect of every humanitarian response. Dignity Kits were developed to address these urgent needs.

How do Dignity Kits protect females?

Without these lifesaving items, females are more at risk of harassment, abuse, and violence. Humanitarian response in previous emergencies has shown that gender-based violence (GBV) – particularly sexual violence - increases in the immediate aftermath of an emergency and must therefore be prioritized as lifesaving at the onset of the response. Dignity kits include locally-relevant items to mitigate GBV risks – such as flashlights and whistles. Information on GBV services is provided either in the kit or as part of a discussion before distribution so that GBV survivors are connected to critical care and support.

What is in a Dignity Kit?

Kits typically contain standard hygiene items such as sanitary napkins, hand soap, toothbrush, toothpaste, underwear, amongst other things, but can include protection items such as radios, whistles, lights, etc. Contents may vary as needs change. For Nepal, the contents have been customized to include culturally-appropriate items. Each kit contains the following:

1. Reusable Sanitary Napkins - 3
2. Underwear - 2
3. Petticoat - 2
4. Maxi - 1
5. Blouse/T-shirt - 1
6. Sari/Dhoti - 1
7. Sweater - 1
8. Shawl - 1
9. Thin Towel (Gamcha) - 1
10. Flashlight - 1
11. Cloth washing soap - 3
12. Comb - 1
13. Nail cutter - 1
14. Toothbrush - 1
15. Toothpaste - 1
16. Bathing soap - 2
17. Bag - 1

What should we do alongside distribution of Dignity Kits?

Dignity cannot be delivered in a “kit” - dignity is a right. Therefore, distribution of Dignity Kits cannot be a stand-alone activity – it must be accompanied by discussions, information-sharing, awareness-raising, etc. The distribution of kits is viewed as an intervention in and of itself - an opportunity to meet and speak to women and girls, and to provide necessary information and better understand their concerns. Distribution of Dignity Kits can be done alongside other relief items targeting females – shelter, food, NFI.

For instance, information on critical issues can be shared before distribution such as where/how to access humanitarian services and information on reproductive health, legal rights, childcare, hygiene, and GBV. Distribution also presents an opportunity for awareness-raising on hygiene issues, such as how and where to wash or dispose of menstrual items and explanations of each item in the kit.

Discussions can address issues of women’s needs and concerns. It is a good way to better understand their situation – so we can target our response based on their demands. Possible questions could be:

- Do you feel safe in this site? Are there places where you do NOT feel safe? What do you think could be done about this?
- What do you do during the day? In the evenings? How are you occupying your time?
- Is there a place where you gather during the day? Where do you sleep?
- Are the toilets and bathing areas working? Are they safe? Do women and girls use them?
- Are you able to access distribution of relief items?
- What services exist? What services are missing? Are there any services that you need to access but cannot?
- What are the greatest needs you face right now?

Who are Dignity Kits distributed to?

Dignity Kits include items that target females of reproductive age.

Discrimination and inequalities are evident across groups. Some people remain highly vulnerable on the basis of socio-economic, language, religious, caste/ethnic, and geographic factors. Inequality within groups makes women, girls, minorities and persons with disabilities particularly vulnerable.
Ensuring equity of access and functional participation of vulnerable people in a respectful and dignified manner is critical for response activities and fair distribution of relief. Natural disasters intensify pre-existing vulnerabilities.

Therefore, if there are more people than kits, please bear in mind the importance of equitable distribution between groups such as different caste/ethnic and religious groups.

Distribution should prioritize vulnerable groups, for example:

- Pregnant women
- Lactating mothers
- Female-headed households
- Disabled women

Who should distribute Dignity Kits?

Dignity Kits are procured by UNFPA and distributed through UNFPA and partners. This must be done in all of the affected areas – geographic coordination is critical. Kits must be distributed by female staff who are able to explain the contents using local language and terminology, in line with the socio-cultural contexts. Further, those who distribute must be resource people, sufficiently informed to answer questions about hygiene, basic health, women’s health, gender-based violence, and so on. They must be prepared with information on local health services and other critical support – particularly to refer cases of GBV.

Where should we distribute Dignity Kits?

Distribution can be embarrassing or uncomfortable for females, especially in conservative communities where they might hesitate to collect the kits because of the contents. To avoid this situation, we should provide information prior to the distribution (what, when, where, how) so females are aware and are able to safely and comfortably collect the Dignity Kit. The distribution must be organized in a discrete or private space – with room for discussion. One option is through Female-Friendly Spaces (FFS) or Child-Friendly Spaces (CFS). FFS are integrated spaces for support, services, and shelter offering a range of services including resources, information, social networks, and can be used for various activities such as individual or group counseling, awareness-raising, skills-building, NFI distribution (including Dignity Kits), and recreational activities.

How should we track distribution of Dignity Kits?

UNFPA will provide a sheet in order to track distribution of kits – so we know who has received a kit. It is also important to monitor and evaluate the usefulness of the items and if other items and/or awareness might be needed.

How can we get more information on Dignity Kits?

Upama Malla – umalla@unfpa.org  (9801056034)