

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW



2.1 INTRODUCTION

Literature on this topic and related issues is abundant and comes from varied types of sources. A review of literature relevant to the research question and objectives gives a basic overview of a number of sources that are related to the topic and shows what research has already been done on these issues. By going through the existing literature on the research topic, it can be noted that there is a gap in the knowledge; leading to the creation of the research topic. The question of how Karen refugee women are empowered through humanitarian assistance programs is not yet answered in the existing literature. The review is presented here, examining the following topics: Women in War and Post Conflict Situations; Refugee Women's Needs; Burmese Women's Experiences in Thailand and Burma; Refugee camps in Thailand; Rights Based Approaches and Gender; and Empowerment and Indicators of Empowerment

2.2 WOMEN IN WAR AND POST CONFLICT SITUATIONS

It is well documented that women face specific threats and vulnerabilities in both conflict and post-conflict situations. One of the most serious and well documented threats that women face in conflict situations is that of rape and sexual violence. An understanding in the human rights community and the informed public is that, "the most infamous violence is the systematic use of rape during conflict as a weapon of war. As well as drawing greater number of women into harm's way, conflict escalates the seriousness of mistreatment that women experience" (Henderson, 2004: 1028).

A paper by Gardam and Charlesworth points out that women not only face the threat of sexual violence in armed conflict but that evidence has been found that women experience armed conflict in a different way than men, "These effects differ

widely across cultures depending upon the role of women in particular societies. One thing is clear: armed conflict often exacerbates inequalities that exist in different forms and to varying degrees in all societies and that make women particularly vulnerable when armed conflict breaks out (Gardam and Charlesworth, 2000: 150). Amnesty International points out that violence against women is, “not just a by-product of war, but often a deliberate military strategy, with women particularly targeted in ethnic cleansing campaigns. Women and girls are not just killed, they are raped, sexually attacked, mutilated and humiliated” (BBC, 2004). Once the actual conflict is finished societies continue to change and women continue to have unique experiences due to their gender,

“Women in post conflict situations continue to face specific challenges. As war changes the demographics of a country, women may become heads of households, supporting children, parents or extended families. They may become uprooted, deprived of all assets, and resettled in an unfamiliar community without their usual support networks. These women also may suffer wartime sexual abuse or the loss of a family member. Given this gender-differentiated impact of war, women must participate and benefit from post-conflict development policies and programs if peace is to be sustained” (ICRW, 1998: 1).

Post-conflict situations create numerous vulnerabilities for women. Some of the effects of the post-conflict situation can be: domestic violence directed at women and girls increasing due to the break down of the community support and structure; exclusion of female ex-fighters who may face the risk of losing “respectability” in their community because of their history of involvement with the conflict; women being left out of the peace-building process; marginalization or exclusion of women’s experiences when they have been victims of sexual violence and/or are too afraid to testify; a lack of awareness of women’s rights leading to women not having equal access to security forces; and women being overlooked when credit programs allocate money for starting businesses because they are traditionally not given these roles (GTZ, 2001: 17-18).

These sources are useful for outlining general social impacts and gender-specific impacts in post-conflict situations. These impacts are important to follow since many of them may be present in the refugee situation in Thailand. These points

among others show the importance for female empowerment and gender mainstreaming in post-conflict situations.

2.3 HISTORY OF THE BORDER SITUATION 1984-2005

The Thailand Burma Border Consortium provides a useful overview of the migration of the Karen people from Karen state to Thailand in their bi-annual report.¹ Many ethnic groups have a history of conflict with the SPDC. The Karen National Union (KNU) has been fighting with the military in Karen state and along the border area for many decades. The history of this conflict will be explained here as it is the conflict which corresponds to the refugees living in Mae La camp, the research site for this study.

The first Karen refugees came to Thailand in 1984, at this time the border area was mostly controlled by the indigenous ethnic nationalities in Burma. Black market trade across the border to Thailand helped these groups to pay for their governing systems, resistance armies and some social services.

The KNU had been in rebellion for 35 years already before 1984, often in the dry season the Burmese army would attack and send some refugees to Thailand. These refugees were temporary since once the rainy season arrived the Burmese would withdraw and the Karen were able to return across the border. 1984 marked a “massive offensive” by the Burmese, they were able to penetrate Karen front lines and 10,000 refugees were sent into Thailand, since the Burmese were able to hold their ground, the Karen were not able to return in the rainy season.

During the next ten years the Burmese carried out dry season offensives and continued to occupy more and more Karen land, being able to build supply routes and new bases. More and more refugees fled and the numbers increased to 80,000 by 1994.

¹ A map of the history of the Burmese border situation can be seen on page 87.

1988 and 1990 were important years for those who opposed the military regime. The student uprisings of 1988 sent 10,000 more to Thailand and also instigated links between the ethnic groups and the pro-democracy movement. The KNU had a main office in Manerplaw and there were many other small camps along the border. After Aung San Suu Kyi's victory and subsequent arrest even more people joined the "ethnic/democratic opposition alliances" at Manerplaw. Manerplaw fell to the Burmese Army who were aided by the break away Democratic Karen Buddhist Association (DKBA) in January 1995.

From 1995 to 1997 the Burmese Army continued to gain ground and power as the KNU attempted to re-group. In 1997 a huge dry season offensive left the Burmese Army in control of the entire border area while the ethnic nationalities no longer controlled any significant area. By this time the number of refugees living in Thailand due to the ongoing fighting was up to 115,000 people. Since 1996, almost 3000 ethnic villages have been forced to relocate due to the massive relocation plan of the Burmese Army, affecting over one million people. The number of Karen refugees recorded in Thailand has now increased to approximately 156,000 (TBBC, 2005: 54).

2.4 REFUGEE WOMEN'S NEEDS

The uniqueness of refugee women's needs is widely accepted by organizations such as the United Nations and non-government organizations involved in refugee care. In 1951 UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) outlined guidelines for refugee protection, but in 1991 they published a document recognizing specific protection measures for refugee women. This document follows assessment of refugee women, protection needs and responses, adding protection through assistance, and follow-up and reporting of protection problems. The report states that women and children, "in addition to the basic needs shared with all refugees, refugee women and girls have special protection needs that reflect their gender: they need, for example, protection against manipulation, sexual physical abuse and exploitation, and protection against sexual discrimination in the delivery of good and services (UNHCR, 1991). This source is a strong base and contribution that refugee women have specific needs which need to be met through humanitarian assistance.

A gender perspective is currently being brought to refugee care, in *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, an article from UNHCR focuses on mainstreaming a gender equality perspective in assistance to refugee women, mainly through governments and local NGOs working on these issues. Pointed out is the common misconception that by reaching out only to males and heads of households in refugee communities, everyone will be taken care of. Not only do refugee women, adolescents, and children mark more than half of refugee populations, they also have specific needs and problems in their journeys and new settlements. UNHCR is focusing on empowerment of refugee women, who often are disempowered not only because of their displacement but also demands of them in their new communities, and threats of violence and rape (UNHCR, 2002a). This shows strong support for the necessity that women must be reached out to in refugee communities. With threats of violence and rape, they must be empowered to facilitate eradication of this problem.

The specific experiences and needs of women in conflict and refugee situations are becoming increasingly recognized. Women experience conflict and refugee situations differently than men, facing specific problems therefore requiring assistance that reacts accordingly. A paper by the UNHCR discusses the United Nations Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security. With women being half of the world's population, the UN is striving to make them half of the world's decision-making power. The Resolution calls for 'the prosecution of crimes against women, increased protection of women and girls during war, appointing more women to UN peacekeeping operations and field missions, and ensuring that more women participate in decision-making processes at the national, regional, and international level.' The paper outlines certain key subjects that are relevant in this context. The sections are broken down as follows: Violence Against Women and Girls, Displacement, HIV/AIDS, Economic Security and Empowerment of Women (UNHCR, 2002). This source reiterates the importance of women being half the representation at leadership levels, decision-making levels, and in humanitarian assistance. In order to do so, women must be empowered to take on these roles. It has been experienced in the past that in doing so, violence against women and violence all together will diminish. This source supports that empowerment of women is essential to have their voices heard and presence made in powerful positions and decision-making. Another paper by UNCHR echoes this in shifting the

focus to gender awareness. The main relevant point in this source is that women often face a large part of the burden of displacement because they have to take care of the children and the elderly. This report focuses on a few key factors. The first factor is that women's security and the security of the community are interwoven, women are a main resource for survival and well being in the community. As many men are away from the community due to the conflict, women have large responsibilities to take care of the elderly, the disabled and the children. The second factor has to do with gender awareness and gender mainstreaming; since men and women share many of the same problems they should both contribute to how these problems are solved therefore women must be well represented in decision making levels. The third factor has to do with security and the empowerment of refugee and displaced women. Humanitarian responses not only have to protect women but also must strive to empower them, if women are able to take part in the community's decisions as well as actively participating in all levels of the planning process they will be empowered which will lead to improving security. The fourth factor outlined is the problem of implementation. It has been acknowledged in recent years the specific need for protection of refugee women. Having said this, there is a lack of action to ensure that the tools being created to help refugee women are being implemented (UNHCR, 2002b: 118-119).

2.5 BURMESE WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES IN BURMA AND THAILAND

The specific situation of Karen refugee women gives proof to the literature discussed above in that these women do face specific problems and have needs that must be met through humanitarian assistance. Three main sources outline some of the experiences women in the refugee camps in Thailand have been through while they were still in Burma living under SPDC rule. The refugee women have suffered from and are continuing to be subject to human rights abuses, which are disempowering and mentally, physically and emotionally harmful. Because of this, as recommended above, specific assistance is necessary, especially empowerment in order to help these women deal with what they have had to face.

Women have suffered greatly under the SPDC, the ruling military junta in Burma. The Women's organization of Burma and the Women's League of Burma

have produced many reports that show how women have suffered numerous forms of human rights abuses. The humanitarian crisis is outlined in terms of women's suffering and the extent that women are disadvantaged because of their gender. One report written on women's experiences in Burma states,

“The subjects of this report, women in conflict areas are doubly and in some cases triply disadvantaged. First they are women, and in Burma, gender is destiny. Second they are disadvantaged by their location: as women in conflict areas, they are exposed to the myriad dangers that come from living in a war zone. Third, in many cases these women are disadvantaged by their ethnicity. From those women from ethnic nationalities other than the majority (Burman), they are subject to the same discrimination the SPDC army inflicts on the ethnic fighters” (WOB, 2000: 38).

The problems are outlined in four categories in which women are suffering: health, education, violence against women, and poverty. All of these factors are intertwined, and have led to the suffering and disempowerment of women. Many of the women in the Thai refugee camps suffered from some or all of these factors, hence their reason to escape.

License to Rape covers the story of the Shan women's experiences under the SPDC and is an outright expression and proof of the horrendous sexual violence in Burma. This report does not cover Karen cases but exemplifies the actions of the SPDC which is similar in other states. Rape is being condoned as a 'weapon of war' and the report states, “evidence collected for this report shows clearly that the troops of the Burmese military regime are systematically using rape as weapons in their anti-insurgency campaigns and civilian populations in Shan State” (SWAN, 2002: 8). Also to be noted, only a low number of actual cases are reported due to the stigma attached to rape and since many of these statistics come from women only once they reach the Thai border (SWAN, 2002: 9).

Following the release of *License to Rape*, women from Karen state published a similar report documenting the use of rape as a strategy of war by the Burmese military. *Shattering Silences*, produced by the KWO, documents 125 cases of rape that were found in one year and a half of research. Many women's stories are told in the report, which provide clear evidence of the systematic use of rape inside Burma.

The disempowerment of women is clear, and these incidences of rape affect every aspect of their lives. On page 24 the report explains, “The rape and sexual violence experienced by the Karen women have had profound effects on their mental, physical and emotional well being. They face rejection and stigmatization by their families and communities. They lack both access to legal redress for the crimes, and to crisis and health support. Many of the stories document the anguish and intense mental trauma which the women have survived rape live with everyday” (KWO, 2004: 24-25).

To further worsen the situation, women face many problems when they speak out about their experiences. A statement by Nang Lao Liang Won shows some of the consequences and reactions to the publication of *License to Rape* discussed above. Because of the Thai governments interest in economic and political relations with Burma they have requested that humanitarian assistance staff working on these issues keep a low profile in order not to “embarrass diplomatic relations between Thailand and Burma” (Won, 2004: 2). Since the publication of “License to Rape”, by the Shan Women’s Action Network (SWAN), the organizations cannot operate openly and staff members also have suffered from psychological harassment from the SPDC regime in Burma. Liang Won explains the situation of the NGO SWAN (Shan Women’s Action Network) after the publication of *License to Rape*, “About three months after the publication of the report, SWAN was ordered to close by the Thai authorities. To this day, SWAN cannot operate openly, and SWAN members, many of whom lack legal status in Thailand, remain in fear of raids by the Thai authorities” (Won, 2004: 2). This article shows the difficulty of making a voice for women’s rights in Burma, and the oppression of this by the Thai and Burmese authorities. Actions such as these possibly can cause hindrance to women’s empowerment programs as they are not able to speak up about their experiences and work towards justice against the offenders. As long as women’s voices are stifled and unheard, justice will not be brought to these situations and the women’s fight. Proof of these situations shows the importance of empowerment of refugee women in order to have their voices heard and not stifled by authoritarian power.

2.6 REFUGEE CAMPS IN THAILAND

Researchers have conducted research on the Karen camps in Thailand on numerous topics, none of which have covered the specific topic of empowerment of women.

Sangkook Lee from Seoul National University in Korea wrote a thesis named *The Adaptation and Identities of Karen Refugees: A Case Study of Mae La Refugee Camp in Northern Thailand*. This thesis explores how “Karen refugees adapt themselves to the camp life and how their identities change in the refugee camp” (Lee, 2001: i). The study looks at the adaptation of the refugees in terms of three areas: education, culture and economy. The research found that since the economic activities of the Karen refugees in Mae La camp are limited the NGOs must provide them with food and basic needs. In terms of culture, Lee found that even though the refugees are able to sustain their own culture, it is increasingly influenced by both Thai and western cultures. Due to the necessary presence of these two groups in the refugee situation in order to provide aid and assistance, they inevitably are affecting Karen culture (Lee, 2001: 95). The Karen have been able to keep their education system although now it is mainly run by NGOs who are responsible for revising textbooks and changing the principles of education. One of the main points made by Lee is that since the Thai government has not ratified the refugee convention and therefore does not recognize the Karen as official “refugees”, they “do not have legal status entitled to refugees according to international law” (Lee, 2001: 95). Lee’s thesis points out how Karen lives are being affected due to their life as refugees in Thailand.

Premjai Vungsiriphisal from the Asian Research Center for Migration, Chulalongkorn University conducted research on refugee children in Mae La camp. This paper was presented at the 9th IASFM International Conference on Forced Migration in Sao Paulo, Brazil. The research reports on the lives of the participants while inside Burma and found that over half of the participants had no paid work inside Burma and did not make enough money to feed their entire families. Many times the families were forced from their homes to relocation sites while some chose

to hide in nearby jungles and returned home when it was safe (Vungsiriphisal, 2005: 3). The research in the camps reported that families are provided food from humanitarian organizations since nearly all people living in the camps do not earn any income. Not many people grow vegetables due to limited available land in the camp and most people cannot keep much livestock. Most importantly, the research found that almost half of the parents interviewed reported that their children do not have enough food and that there are reports of acute and chronic malnutrition (Vungsiriphisal, 2005: 4). Many children have been separated from their parents as there are over 2000 orphan children in all of the camps. The paper reports over 90 cases of sexual abuse and violence in the camp since 2002-2003 and this number is believed to be much lower than the actual number of incidents. There was an incident a few years ago of the rape of two Karenni girls by the local volunteer authorities when the girls attempted to go outside of the camps (Vungsiriphisal, 2005: 5). This paper outlines some of the difficulties that those living in the camps have to deal with.

Out of Sight, Out of Mind: Thai policy towards Burmese Refugees is a report from Human Rights Watch which explains the ongoing changing government policy towards Burmese refugees and migrants living in Thailand. One important thing to note that is outlined in the report is the changing policy towards refugee registration in the last few years,

“under intense pressure from the Thai government, on January 1, 2004, UNHCR suspended screening of new asylum seekers (formally known as Refugee Status Determination, or RSD) from Burma, leaving tens of thousands of vulnerable people in a legal and practical limbo. Refugee assistance agencies and human rights groups in Bangkok and on the border were immediately flooded with calls and visits by Burmese asylum seekers asking where to turn for protection. No advance notice was given to the Burmese refugees or refugee relief agencies prior to the abrupt suspension. (Human Rights Watch, 2004: 2)

With an unstable system being used to grant refugee status, it shows how vulnerable the Karen people are to the changing ways of the Thai government.

An honors thesis completed by Adeline Chiang Hsu Leen at the National University of Singapore looks at NGO-Karen relations and is titled *Beyond Humanitarianism: Power and NGO-Karen Refugee Relations*. This research was

conducted in Umphium refugee camp, situated in Tak province in which Mae La refugee camp is also located. This thesis reported that the refugees in Umphium camp were wary and cautious towards the NGOs in the camp. A high incidence of “competitiveness” among the refugees was noted by Leen, it was explained in the following way, “Since the only way a refugee in the camp can obtain some cash or a regular income is from the NGOs, if not from private gifts and donations from friends, relatives and visitors, the NGOs come into the picture when examining the situation of competition in the camp” (Leen, 2002: 32). In terms of fund and donors, Leen reports that “at the end of the day, it seems that in this game of reporting and accounting, the ball perpetually lies in the hands of the NGOs. They are ultimately the ones who decide how much to give, what to give, when to give, who to give to, or even whether not to give in the first place (Leen, 2002: 43). This source shows the heavy weight that the NGOs carry in many dynamics of the camp and how much control they have over the success or failure of certain program and initiatives. The humanitarian/Karen relationship is very complex as the NGOs are undoubtedly having many effects on the refugee’s lives and at the same time are essential to their survival as they are their source for food, medical, shelter and education services.

2.7 HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE IN KAREN CAMPS

The Karen people began fleeing from the SPDC across the border to Thailand in 1984, at this point in time the Ministry of Interior asked NGOs already working with Indochinese refugees in Thailand to provide emergency assistance to approximately 9000 Karen refugees. The MOI emphasized the need to keep this assistance to essential assistance only as it was thought to be a temporary situation. As many different groups assessed the situation along the border area they came together and agreed to open a bank account where many agencies could contribute funds to, this program would operate under the name Consortium of Christian Agencies (CCA), this name was changed to the Burma Border Consortium (BBC) in 1991 in order to be more inclusive and then changed again to the Thailand Burma Border Consortium (TBBC) in 2004 when it was incorporated in London with 10 member agencies. (TBBC, 2005: 48).

The CCSDPT (Committee for Coordination of Services to Displaced Persons in Thailand) was formed in order to avoid duplication and competition between organizations working along the border area. The CCSDPT holds a monthly co-ordination meeting in Bangkok and the MOI sets its policy and administrates the assistance programs through CCSDPT (TBBC, 2005: 48).

The humanitarian assistance provided for the Burmese refugees has grown dramatically since the first few organizations came together in 1984. Under the CCSDPT the NGOs are divided into three main areas of relief assistance which are primary health and sanitation; education; and food, shelter and relief. TBBC is the only organization in the food shelter and relief category as they take care of this portion fully. Under primary health and sanitation there are seven organizations, namely:

- AMI (Aide Medicale Internationale),
- ARC (ARC International)
- COERR (Catholic Office for Emergency Relief and Refugees)
- HI (Handicap International)
- IRC (International Rescue Committee)
- MHD (Malteser Germany)
- MSF (Medicins Sans Frontieres)

Under the education category there are 12 organizations:

- ADRA (Adventist Development and Relief Agency)
- BDEPT (Burma Distance Education Project)
- CARE (Community Addiction Recovery and Education Project)
- COERR (Catholic Office for Emergency Relief and Refugees)
- CT (Consortium Thailand)
- ICS (Internationaal Christelijik Steunfonds Asia)
- IRC (International Rescue Committee)
- JRS (Jesuit Rescue Service)
- SVA (Shanti Volunteer Association)
- TOPS (Taipei Overseas Peace Service)
- WEAVE (Women's Education for Advancement and Empowerment)
- ZOA (ZOA Refugee Care The Netherlands)²

Acquiring the money to provide services to nearly 160,000 refugees is no small feat. While the NGOs undertake the responsibility to provide humanitarian assistance to the displaced population they also assume the responsibility of acquiring

² The structure of relief assistance can be seen in chart form on page 85.

the finances required to support the refugees. TBBC expenditure in 2004 totaled 763 million baht and money was received from numerous international governments and organizations.

2.8 EMPOWERMENT AND INDICATORS OF EMPOWERMENT

ActionAid, an international NGO, discusses that since exclusion is a “factor of power”; restoration of power through empowerment is key. Exclusion can be based on the following things: race, class, color, sex, gender, language, national or ethnic identity, caste, descent, occupation, ‘untouchability’, religion, social origin, disability, sexual orientation, diverse gender identities, age and innumerable other factors. This source explains empowerment as “the creation of strong institutions and peoples who can claim their rights and can access, benefit, and control a resource base sufficient for life with dignity” (Action Aid, 2004: 78).

Gender mainstreaming and women’s empowerment is discussed in many sources, a few key points will be drawn out here to give a general idea of the literature. These models of empowerment focus on the importance of meeting the needs of people disempowered such as the examples given above. In Joachim Theis’ book on Rights Based Approaches, he gives the definition of women’s empowerment as follows:

“Empowerment: The economic, social, cultural and political conditions that remove the power of women and girls have to be reversed. For this to happen, women must:

- Be economically independent from men
- Have social security so that they are not forced to work in underpaid and exploitative environments
- Control when and how many children they have
- Participate fully in all decisions that affect them and their families
- Have full access to gender-sensitive basic and continuing education, including sexual education” (Theis, 2004: 36)

Various authors and researchers provide many different definitions of women’s empowerment, but all follow common themes and goals. By investigating all of these definitions, a measure for understanding the success of women’s empowerment in the refugee camps can be formed. Marilee Karl defines women’s empowerment as:

- “Awareness building about women’s situation, discrimination, and rights and opportunities as a step towards gender equality. Collective awareness building provides a sense of group identity and the power of working as a group.
- Capacity building and skills development, especially the ability to plan, make decisions, organize, manage and carry out activities, to deal with people and institutions in the world around them.
- Participation and greater control and decision-making power in the home, community and society
- Action to bring about greater equality between men and women”

(Karl, 1995: 14)

When Leslie Calman speaks of women’s empowerment in her book, she gives support that organizations can create sustainable development, “All share the belief that services *delivered* to poor women are of little use in creating a sustained transformation. Their interest is in the empowerment of women, not merely their uplift: they are helping women to gain the capacity to make important decisions—financial, social, familial, personal—in their own lives, to have a sense of personal and community efficacy” (Calman, 1992: 177). By simply giving services to women in terms of things such as food, health and finance one is not able to create a sustainable situation. By giving women the tools to generate these things for themselves, the service providers will not be needed long term.

A specific example of refugee empowerment is taken from a case in Sri Lanka, in an article by K. C. Saha. The article discusses an organization called Organization for Eelam Refugees Rehabilitation (OfEER) that has various programs for the refugees, including empowerment. Focused on is the fact that many refugees going through these programs move on to run the programs themselves or have sustainable careers. The organization has provided an empowerment model for other refugee organizations to use. The article describes that this model demonstrates that a refugee-run organization can do the following, “base programs on accurate knowledge of refugee needs; put resources to optimum use for the benefit of maximum number of refugees; ensure that the needs of vulnerable community members are not ignored; integrate health, nutrition, income-generation, micro credit and skills training programs; devise ingenious methods to mobilize resources from expatriates both in the countries of resettlement and origin; provide practical training

and technical assistance to build sustainable livelihoods; establish credibility with donors and attract new funding sources” (Saha, 2005: 2). The empowerment model shows that programs can provide options for the future for refugees through what they learn. This is a good example to compare with what the humanitarian assistance of the Karen refugees is providing for future implications and shows possibilities of what can be done to improve the programs. This source shows that empowerment can in part be measured by the involvement of the refugee women now running the programs after themselves being empowered.

UNHCR outlines definitions of empowerment and disempowerment as well as five dimensions of women’s empowerment. The first four dimensions are chosen by the research to be indicators to measure women’s empowerment for the purpose of this study. These four indicators were chosen due to them being the most relevant to the refugee population and also since they are the most thorough in their definitions, including the relevant aspects of other definitions, noted above. The fifth dimension (gender equality mainstreaming) is not used as an indicator for the purpose of the analysis as it refers to contents of the humanitarian program rather than giving another indicator in which to measure women’s empowerment. The definitions and indicators of empowerment are as follows:

Empowerment: “A process through which women and men in disadvantaged positions increase their access to knowledge, resources, and decision-making power, and raise their awareness of participation in their communities, in order to reach a level of control over their own environment” (UNHCR, 2001: 3).

Disempowerment: “Any action, policy development and/or relief program or process through which women’s and men’s priorities, needs and interests are further ignored, reducing their participation in decision-making and representing an obstacle to their economic, political and social improvement” (UNHCR, 2001: 3).

Access: “Access refers to the idea that displaced and returnee women should enjoy equal access with men to goods and services, which increases a woman’s overall security. To understand access as empowering, one must examine the social, political and economic context of a population. Access alone does not meet empowerment needs but is an important dimension of the empowerment process” (UNHCR, 2001: 6).

Conscientization: “Conscientization is the process of becoming aware that gender roles and unequal relations are not part of a natural order, nor determined by biology. Gender roles are typically conveyed through everyday messages in government

policies, law, the mass media, school textbooks, and religious and traditional practices. They often reflect systematic discrimination against a social group that limits choices or roles (for example, men should not look after children, women should not participate in elections). Empowerment entails the recognition by men and women that the subordination of women is imposed by a system of discrimination which is socially constructed, and can be altered” (UNHCR, 2001: 6).

Mobilization: “Individual women at home are unlikely to make much progress in challenging traditional assumptions. Mobilization is the process of women meeting together to discuss common problems, very often leading to the formation of women’s organizations and networks and public lobbying for the recognition of women’s rights. Through mobilization, women identify gender inequalities, recognize the elements of discrimination and oppression, and devise collective strategies to challenge problems” (UNHCR, 2001: 6)

Control: Control refers to a balance of power between women and men, so that neither is in a position of dominance. It means that women have power alongside men to influence their destiny and that of their society (UNHCR, 2001: 7).

Gender equality mainstreaming: “Gender equality mainstreaming is both a strategy and a process for transforming gender relations. It ensures that the different interests, needs and resources of displaced women and men, girls and boys, are taken into consideration at every step of the refugee cycle, in UNHCR protection activities, as well as in program design, planning, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. It requires active consultation with displaced women, men and youth in all aspects of UNHCR’s work” (UNHCR, 2005: 7).