Gender-Sensitive Post-Disaster Rehabilitation Guidance –

Livelihood

Creating and recreating livelihoods is one of the most crucial components of recovery and reconstruction. Disaster affected areas can only be fully revitalised if earning opportunities are present on a large enough scale, beyond the activities of relief aid organisations. One aspect to restoring self-sufficiency and opening up earning possibilities is the recovery of pre-disaster economic opportunities. The other main aspect is the development of new livelihood opportunities, where possible.

Often, reconstruction aid is focussed on revitalising the most visible industries in a region, as with the supply of boats and fishing equipment after the 2004 tsunami. However, a broader reconstruction reach that depending on the type of disaster covers the restoration of small agricultural plots, and compensates for the loss of tools and assets owned by those engaged outside the most visible industries, can be equally important for the economic recovery of disaster affected areas and of individual households. Flooding, droughts, hurricanes, tsunamis and other types of disaster can wreak havoc on agricultural land. Because it is often cultivated by women in the informal sector, and can therefore be more easily overlooked, the damage is not always incorporated into disaster assessments and recovery schemes in proportion to its significance for the affected households (IEG 2006).

Box 3.1: Good Practice

Responding to extensive flooding in Chokwe district of Mozambique, the International Labour Organisation targeted women when it was evident that the heavily-female sectors of agriculture and small trade had been extensively damaged. Women traders and farmers were given relief assistance, and were also directly engaged in the ILO’s labor-intensive programming. Of those directly benefiting from ILO initiatives (e.g., relocating markets, vocational training, restoring livestock), 87% were women. Source: ILO (2000)
Reconstruction agendas may also exclude replacing the tools necessary for women’s economic activities that were typical before the disaster occurred. Sewing machines, and bicycles used for transporting goods to be marketed are two examples that could make a considerable difference to women’s ability to recover livelihoods in some areas, and that were not included in reconstruction assistance in recent disasters (Tata Institute of Social Sciences 2005). Investment practices with a gender bias can pose a further obstacle to recovery. Loans in the USA were found to be awarded disproportionately to male-owned businesses after disasters, although female-owned businesses also fail, as in the aftermath of the 1997 Red River floods (Enarson n.d.).

Access to micro-credit under feasible terms can be equally important in recovering pre-disaster livelihoods and developing new ones. When floods in Bangladesh temporarily impaired women’s ability in the affected areas to continue trading in vegetables, sugar cane, clothes and other goods, micro-credit NGOs offering loans to low income women did not defer payments, which drove some to loan sharks, locking them in a cycle of increasing debt (Lovekamp 2003).

Certainly, while making micro-credit schemes accessible and feasible, it is also necessary to ensure the operational and financial viability of micro-finance institutions and to maintain a cash flow during and after disasters. Nevertheless, there are policies that could ease the contradiction between these apparently contradictory needs. At the simplest, access to credit on affordable should be open to women as well as to men, and it should be available in traditionally women-dominated occupations as well. On a more complex level, it may be wise for micro-finance institutions to restrict reconstruction and rehabilitation assistance to existing clients, while opportunities may be offered to those newly seeking credit through disaster-specific aid schemes provided by government or by international organisations. It may also prove to be effective to implement a coherent disaster response at the sector level, instead of fragmented response by individual micro-finance institutions. Economies of scale could be achieved through consolidating disaster risk identification and assessment, and effectiveness could be boosted by institutional specialization in providing a range of credit, savings and insurance services (Pantoja 2002). In addition, a subsidized reinsurance policy could be considered that would be activated only in case of emergency, subject to reaching critical values of well-defined indicators (such as the scale of damage, or the obtaining of emergency financial packages from international institutions).
Access to training in new skills, as well as broadening knowledge and capacity in existing operations is equally important for women and for men. However, women have in the past found it particularly difficult to access training and capacity building. Even among the 71 gender projects that were surveyed by the World Bank Independent Evaluation Group, only 18 planned training programmes. In the agriculture sector, cultural taboos have kept women from receiving advice on improved practices (IEG 2006). Not only does this penalise women where much or all of agricultural labour is provided by female workers, but the practice can have broader implications for food security itself.

Box 3.2: Good Practice

To overcome the problem of insufficient advice for women on improved practices in agriculture and in other fields, recent projects trained female extension workers to reach women in rural areas. In projects in 1989 in Yemen, 1992 in Cameroon, 2000 in Mali, 2001 in Tunisia and 2002 in China, female extension workers gave advice on animal husbandry and orchard management. They also developed creative materials and methods for accessing hard to reach audiences, such as drama and farmer competitions as well as using the mass media. In the 1992 Cameroon project, subsequent follow-up research indicated that around 40% of women improved their nutritional knowledge, and 20% improved their nutritional practices.

Source: IEG (2006)

Training and capacity building in new forms of livelihood should ideally be offered to men as well as to women. Past experience has also been largely positive in offering training and employment outside the occupations traditionally considered appropriate for a gender group. Cultural constraints on jobs deemed appropriate for given social groups have proved to be more durable in the case of religious-ethnic customs. In India, for example, where the caste system is still very strong in practice in many regions, higher caste members have refused to participate in courses in basket weaving and similar occupations that are
associated with the lower castes. While it is advisable therefore to proceed with cultural sensitivity and awareness of local social rules when designing training programs, other examples have been very encouraging. Many cases have been recorded, including in India, where women successfully launched new careers in non-traditional areas such as electrical fitting, masonry and carpentry, against initial resistance from male relatives, but soon accepted by families and communities (Chopra 2005, Oxfam 2005b).

**Box 3.3: Lessons learned**

A group of women in Mulukutú, Nicaragua organised themselves following Hurricane Joan in 1988 to recover from the disaster. The women were concerned with the loss of lives, houses and productive assets, but also with pre-disaster conditions including high rates of domestic violence, problems with sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and unwanted pregnancies, and a lack of political power in the municipality. They started with a construction project for housing destroyed by the hurricane. Over the next ten years, and with the help of the men in the community, the women of Mulukutú successfully established a brick factory, carpentry workshops, and a women’s clinic.

Source: Delaney and Shrader (2000), citing Puntos de Encuentro Special Bulletin on Gender and Hurricane Mitch (Mainstream Gender into Disaster Recovery and Reconstruction, WBI, 2009)

Promoting Gender Justice in Disaster Reconstruction: Guidelines for Gender-Sensitive and Community-based Planning. Ahmedabad: Disaster Mitigation Institute)

This list alerts practitioners to issues that need attending to in relief and reconstruction work and which, if overlooked, can have profound and extremely detrimental impacts on women. (Source: Enarson (2001a)
Women’s work is often socially invisible, even though in most households around the world it is their unpaid and paid work that is at the heart of household well-being. Economic rehabilitation and reconstruction must target economically active women of all ages and social groups.

- Assume women are economic providers: target the informal sector.
- Implement economic initiatives that include arenas in which women are involved and likely to have sustained losses in the wake of disaster (especially those whose work is dependent on natural resources). Give priority to restoration of economic resources that will contribute to women’s economic recovery.
- Target self-employed artisans and home-based workers for grants and loans to replace tools and resources that have been damaged.
- Help to expand women’s employment opportunities.
- Seek women’s inputs in identifying changes to be implemented in restoring and replacing assets, spaces, systems (pertaining to fodder, water storage, etc).
- Monitor access to work, wages, training, and working conditions, as well as the impact on women and girls, in public and private relief work projects.
- Evaluate women’s ability to participate in and benefit from economic recovery packages. (Are women mobile compared to men? Are child-care centres available? Are health services available for the injured and the sick?)