Experience of Post Disaster Recovery from Gender Perspective – Shifting from Vulnerabilities to Capacities

1. Enabling Women to Play a Lead Role in Disaster-Affected Marginal Communities: Gender Mainstreaming in Tsunami-Affected Areas Caritas India, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala & Andaman and Nicobar Islands, India

The Initiative

This Tsunami Relief and Rehabilitation Programme was initiated in January 2005 and is an ongoing programme linking relief to development. The thrust of the current ongoing "community mobilization" phase is to strengthen community capacity for self-help. It seeks to: (1) strengthen and establish linkages for disaster preparedness, and (2) respond to localized epidemics like chikungunya, fire outbreak and flood. All the initiatives taken under the CBDP component are expected to be integrated into the ongoing/planned programmes of the respective Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) to ensure sustainability.

Initially the focus was on relief and reconstruction but it has shifted to CBDP and housing after the women began playing a decisive role. Drawing inspiration from previous successful experiences, women's monitoring committees were set up to monitor the CBDP and housing programmes. In all efforts/activities undertaken, community participation was given top priority, with a particular emphasis on community ownership and commitment. The housing programmes provided secure shelters to the tsunami-affected communities, especially women and children. Participation gave women the strength to take further initiatives to reduce their dependency. The CBDP programmes have increased the knowledge held by women, men and children, and enhanced their capacity to address various disasters, natural and man-made.

1 UN/ISDR, Gender Perspective: Working Together for Disaster Risk Reduction, Good Practices and Lessons Learned, Geneva, June 2007
Training on certain skills was provided to the women to generate alternative employment. In other words, the programmes enhanced women's participation and their capacity to take a leading role in development in their communities which, until then, was unimaginable. In all activities, priority was given to building women's capacity and encouraging equal participation of both men and women.

**Good practices**

In Andhra Pradesh State when initiating the CBDP programmes, efforts were made to ensure that the programmes were led and controlled by women from the communities involved. Emphasis was also laid on utilizing local resources and reducing dependency on outside support. In some cases, special training was given to women on disaster issues. For instance, in a recent flood in Andhra Pradesh State, communities played a major role in the rescue programme, paying special attention to children, pregnant women, old people and the disabled. In some villages in this state, communities have created village emergency funds based on household "handful-of-rice" and "kitchen-utensil" contributions.

In Alleppey District (Kerala State), women comprise 50 percent of task force committee members, 50 per cent of village-level disaster management teams, and 70 per cent of both central-level resource teams and central-level trauma counseling teams. More priority was given to widows and "weaker" women when selecting the beneficiaries of the housing programme. In Thiruvananthapuram District (Kerala State), village communities have taken initiatives to convert waste, which was a breeding ground for mosquitoes and diseases, into vermin compost. This helped address the chikungunya menace in the area.

In Pondicherry, women's self-help groups (volunteered and took the lead in supplying relief items to the affected community. Children in Chinavererapatinam village informed the Fire and Rescue Department when fire broke out. The taskforce in Chinnakalapet taught children swimming and helped to put out fire.

Tsunami early warning systems have been installed at the Cuddalore Harbour; and in each village, women read out weather forecasts, wave lengths and wind directions through local public address systems. In villages supported by the Chengalpattu Rural Development Society (in Tamil Nadu State, village development committees are formed, comprising 50 per cent of women who are responsible for the overall development of the village and they are doing very good work in addressing social and
development issues. In Pondicherry, women's self-help groups (volunteer red and took the lead in supplying relief items to the affected community. Children in Chinavererapatinam village informed the Fire and Rescue Department when fire broke out. The taskforce in Chinnakalapet taught children

**Lessons Learned**

Key lessons learned from the practice are:

Community rapport helps in building bonds between people and programmes; projects should be rights-based and involve people from the beginning through community ownership and participation (with confidence-building); equitable role for men and women is possible; and knowledge exists within the community and utilizing it increases their ownership, positive impact and sustainability.

Other lessons are: enhancing attitudinal changes through the walk-the-talk principle/concrete example is possible, male involvement is important in empowering women and improving gender relations, and giving more importance to gender perspectives is a must in projects/programmes.

Lastly, building women's capacity increases their participation in planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. This yields greater benefit as women have better understanding of the felt needs of the communities, and they have unique perspectives about and an important insight into community danger and safety.

2. **Gendering DRR Capacity-Building for Tsunami Recovery Service Providers**

   **Laying the Foundation: Gendering Capacity-Building for DRR, Sri Lanka**

   *UNDP Sri Lanka Tsunami Recovery Unit, Sri Lanka & Institute of Bankers Sri Lanka (IBSL)*

**The Initiative**

In a post-tsunami recovery context in view of long-term disaster risk reduction (DRR), this initiative seeks to build Gender & DRR awareness among capacity building institutions in Sri Lanka by helping
integrate gender-specific aspects into the training curricula of a key capacity building institute, the Institute of Bankers Sri Lanka (IBSL).

This programme, funded by the Government of Germany through the Tsunami Flash Appeal, is a part of the UNDP Sri Lanka Tsunami Recovery Programme launched in March 2005, covering 14 tsunami-affected districts in Sri Lanka's Northern, Eastern, Western and Southern provinces. The implementing bodies were the Institute of Bankers Sri Lanka (IBSL) and the UNDP Sri Lanka Tsunami Recovery Unit. The IBSL, a leading training/capacity development organization serving the development sector, has been entrusted with building the capacity of service provider organizations/individuals that provide livelihood recovery support in all tsunami affected districts in Sri Lanka. Their role was to build the capacities of service provider organizations to deliver services that can help develop livelihoods better with long-term sustainability. The service provider organizations included microcredit organizations, rural marketing organizations, skill development organizations and women's groups. The final beneficiaries were service provider organizations in tsunami-affected districts that assist livelihood recovery and tsunami stricken women and men who depend on their services for livelihood recovery.

It was observed that the IBSL regular training curricular initially had no gender sensitivity, and the IBSL training resource team and programme coordination team, comprised of all men lacked awareness of and exposure to gender issues, especially in a disaster context. In identifying these gaps, efforts were made to support the integration of gender-specific aspects into the IBSL training methodology and to include skilled resource persons into the trainers team.

The training programmes were conducted in each administrative district, with three programmes targeting the same group in each district. The programme curricular included accounting, book keeping, human resources management, and the issues related to identification and liaison with the clients, in particular those who are not familiar with the formal aspects of business/enterprise management. In terms of the gender aspects, the training programmes addressed specific problems encountered by women entrepreneurs in accessing credit due to lack of collaterals and access to productive resources, gaps in their ability to prepare business plans, and prejudices and social acceptability at marketing and decision-making levels as well as among formal institutions.
The training resource group included key national-level trainers who are also connected to many other training programmes for national-level decision makers within institutions such as the Central Bank of Sri Lanka and a number of other development and rural banks that deliver rural credit and development-related services, which opens scope for furthering the gender and DRR concepts, and application issues.

The Good Practice

The initiative is a good practice because it addresses gender blindness in development and DRR; it raises gender & DRR awareness among individuals and organizations in the immediate and long-term; it helps infuse a leading training organization with gender sensitivity; it leads to the involvement of women as resource persons at the decision-making level, and creates more opportunities for women entrepreneurs in disaster-prone areas.

The training programmes convey the messages to a range of organizations and individuals in the development and DRR sectors. Additionally, the initiative provides women with more space to participate, develop businesses, be part of credit and insurance schemes and expand their livelihood options. This will help reduce their risks to disasters and enhance their capacities.

Further, the initiative leads to a gendered understanding of development and DRR concepts, how they are applied on the ground and how gender based differences can lead to discrimination, marginalization and increased vulnerability. Therefore, it is an important step towards changes in long-term gender relations at institutional and application levels which aim to influence decision makers and the public through fundamental gender & DRR messages.

The innovative element in this initiative is that in contrast to the general practice of including women as 'trainees' or 'beneficiaries' this initiative mainstreams the issue into the training curriculum itself. This helps address Gender & DRR issues in a more strategic and sustainable manner.
Lessons Learned

A key lesson learned from the initiative is that members of the IBSL management team need to be led to act as advocates for mainstreaming gender into DRR. To encourage similar initiatives in the future, there is a need to monitor the programme for its impact and support it further with capacity development resources. The initiative offers scope to integrate gender issues into nationwide credit and insurance schemes -- as a risk reduction measure through the IBSL resource team.

3. Grassroots Women Handle Quake Impact Unaided

Developing Grassroots Women Trainers on Disaster Recovery and Resilience Building, Indonesia

GROOTS International & UPLINK (Urban Poor Link) Java Island, Indonesia

The Initiative

After the May 2006 earthquake on Java Island in Indonesia, grassroots women played an active role and worked alongside men to organize their communities in the absence of external support. The women ran temporary shelters, community kitchens and aid distribution at a time when some communities had to run their own temporary shelters for as long as two months before they received external assistance. For most of the women involved, it was the first time they participated in decision making and played public roles on community issues. This formed the basis for subsequent efforts by a local NGO called UPLINK (Urban Poor Link) and the GROOTS International network to sustain women’s participation in disaster-related decision making and to strengthen and transfer effective resilience building practices through women. One of these efforts by UPLINK and GROOTS International is the present initiative which has two components: (1) women’s initiative to cope with the impact of the May 2006 earthquake on Java Island in Indonesia, in the absence of external aid, and (2) efforts to build and sustain women’s leadership and community coping capacities in disaster-affected and at-risk communities.

The initiative is under way in 10 villages (including Puchung Growong, Kategan and Manding) in Yogyakarta Province, Java Island, Indonesia. In May 2006, women responded to the earthquake along with their communities. Building on these initiatives, GROOTS International has worked with UPLINK
to build the capacity of women’s groups in Yogyakarta Province to sustain their participation and leadership. In December 2006, at a capacity-building workshop organized by UPLINK and GROOTS International, women leaders shared their experiences and identified skills they could share with other communities. Over the following few months, UPLINK has run training-of-trainers workshops to strengthen the women’s leadership and build their capacities to analyze and transfer their disaster response strategies.

Follow-up activities are being planned.

The Good Practice

In a society with severe constraints on women’s participation in public decision making, the postdisaster relief and recovery processes have been a rare opportunity for women to step into new public roles and get involved in community decision making. The two processes have enabled the grassroots women to demonstrate that they have the capacity to organize communities, manage collective resources and analyze the appropriateness of external aid reaching their communities. The work done by the women has dispelled the myth that grassroots women’s efforts benefit women only. In fact, the women’s efforts clearly have helped respond to family and community needs. In the process, they have also brought about some innovations. A first innovation is that the initiative made the women aware, for the very first time, of their leadership potential and fulfilling such a potential helped them contribute to rapid recovery and resilience in their communities. Another innovation is that the initiative addresses both practical community resilience-building needs and strategic women empowerment needs, and it also seeks to strengthen and scale up women’s leadership and knowledge of resilience building by helping grassroots leaders become trainers.

Lessons Learned

A key lesson from the initiative is that outside agencies often believe that disaster-affected people are not in a position to participate actively in information gathering, assessment or decision making relating to their own relief and recovery. Yet the present initiative shows that grassroots women and their
communities are in a better position to respond to community needs and to decide on what kind of support a disaster-affected community requires.

Another lesson is that grassroots women and their communities are also well positioned to organize assistance. Therefore, external relief and recovery programmes, including those of governments, should build on these for the sake of efficiency and optimal use of resources. In fact, putting information and resources in the hands of grassroots women helps achieve equitable aid distribution and prevent wastage of aid resources. Finally women can organize to address community priorities in a post-disaster context, but sustaining this in the following months can be difficult.

4. Women-to-women learning in Gujarat and Maharashtra, India

Some innovative peer learning methods have proven particularly successful as the example in following case of women to women training supported by Groots, a network of women’s organisations in 40 countries, and itself supported by the Huairou Commission shows:

_Five women who lived through and survived these disasters in Turkey spent two weeks in India after the 1993 earthquake. They spoke to women like them, women who had lost everything, or lost a great deal. Women who were determined to rebuild not just their homes but also their lives. Women who had never imagined that they could step out of their homes. Yet, like them, these women were prepared to travel long distances, even cross the seas to share their experiences, to learn from others, to find ways to turn the tragedy of a disaster into the opportunity of a sane and stable development._


5. Post Disaster Reconstruction Experiences Andhra Pradesh, India

_Pre Reconstruction Scenario of Dibbulapalem_

Dibbulapalem is slum on the banks of Thandava River in a low-lying area. There are about 70 families. This colony was branded as a sex workers colony and all governmental agencies and the public neglected it. The majority of them was illiterate and their children were sent to cashew factories as labourers.
The cyclone of 1995 was devastating and it washed away all the thatched houses of Dibbalapalem. The residents lost all their belongings and were left bare. At this juncture NASA stepped into the Dibbalapalem colony and started an awareness campaign and conducted health camps. All women were organized as Women Sangham and they were successfully persuaded to abandon prostitution. NASA helped the women’s Sangham to mobilize and solicit a grant from the government for housing and the grant from the Emergency Desk of Diakonisches Werk was also requested. NASA facilitated the construction of 74 houses with the active participation of the women’s organization, which organized its own brick making unit, mobilized voluntary labour, monitored the construction, introduced cost control measures. The title deeds of the houses were obtained in the name of the women. Housing brought a tremendous change in the lives of the women. They were counseled and motivated to save regularly and helped to mobilize matching grants from the government to take up alternative forms of living like micro-businesses.

The children were guided to get admission into Government schools and in NASA’s child labour schools. After completion of the houses, the Sangham mobilized government support for internal roads, community hall, electricity and developed kitchen gardens in next the houses. With permanent houses and beautiful roads, the hitherto slum now gives a posh look. The bad name for the locality also got erased over years. Some of the women converted part of their houses, facing the main road, into shops. The spirit and motivation that propelled hitherto sex workers to transform themselves into dignified citizens was possible through an effective organizational network. This brought assertiveness among them and a desire to a lead in the democratic process. The women participated in local municipal elections and got one candidate elected as councilor for their area and also cornered the chairperson’s post to their candidate.

Source: Annie Jayaraj, POST DISASTER RECONSTRUCTION EXPERIENCES IN ANDHRA PRADESH, IN INDIA, P9-10

http://www.grif.umontreal.ca/pages/i-rec%20papers/annie.pdf

6. UNIFEM’s Gender Mainstreaming Efforts after the Tsunami Disaster in Aceh, Sri Lanka and Somalia
To amplify women's voices to influence recovery policies and agendas, UNIFEM is building the capacity and leadership of women's organizations to advocate for the promotion of women's rights in all reconstruction processes.

Gender advisors are in place in Aceh and Sri Lanka, advocating with government, UN Country Teams, and NGOs on women's most pressing needs and ensuring that their perspectives are part of mainstream efforts. UNIFEM is also working closely with local coordination agencies and task forces, such as the Aceh Bureau for Reconstruction and Rehabilitation (BRR), the Somali Aid Coordination Body Tsunami Task Force (SACB), and the Government Task Force on Tsunami Relief (TAFREN) in Sri Lanka to highlight women's leadership roles. Support is going to building the capacity of national women's machineries to form gender units or women's desks within government recovery processes to monitor the inclusion of women's perspectives in all decision-making. Local women's groups are receiving support to build skills, organize, and conduct advocacy activities to make themselves heard at local and national policy-making levels. They are also being supported to mobilize women to participate in grassroots activities through forums and mobile discussions.

To ensure that efforts at the policy level are derived from and remain connected to what women are really prioritizing on the ground, major women's consultations were organized in May and June 2005 in Colombo, Sri Lanka, and in Aceh, gathering hundreds of women to discuss their concerns and articulate their role in the recovery and rebuilding phase. Both meetings were the first time women from different affected districts and villages came together. Besides more immediate concerns about livelihoods, inheritance and property rights, and the creation of adequate settlements and housing, the issue put forward as most critical in the post-emergency phase, was the need for more opportunities for women to interact with local and national authorities, and participate in decision making to engage with the reconstruction process.

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2 National women's machineries include the Bureau of Women Empowerment in Aceh, the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Social Welfare, and the National Committee of Women in Sri Lanka, and the Ministry of Women and Family Affairs of Puntland, Somalia. A gender unit has already been set up in Aceh, while in Somalia, UNIFEM partner NGO WAWA (We are Women Activists) is lobbying for the creation of one within the SABC. In Sri Lanka, advocacy efforts are underway to urge the creation of an NGO Task Force to focus on women's issues.
Recommendations from the meetings were brought to the highest policy levels – during a visit in May, UNIFEM’s executive director and South Asia regional programme director raised the issues with the Sri Lankan Prime Minister, Foreign Minister and UN Country Team ahead of a donor Development Forum, when it was discovered that women's perspectives were being marginalized in its planning process; in Aceh, after recommendations from the women's consultation were brought to the BRR, its chief promised to recognize and consult with the Aceh Women's Council (a body creating at the meeting to represent Acehnese women), and appointed UNIFEM as its gender advisor.

To address the paucity of sex-disaggregated data, UNIFEM is further developing the databanks created in the emergency period by continuing to collect detailed information on all local organisations working on gender issues, including informal and traditional groups. In both Aceh and Sri Lanka, surveys have been carried out in IDP shelters to obtain more first-hand data on women's situation – these will be made available in early 2006. In Somalia, UNIFEM is giving support to the women's ministry to collect gender-sensitive data.


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3 In Aceh, 6,497 women IDPs living in tents, temporary shelters and host communities were surveyed in 17 out of 21 districts. In Sri Lanka 53,361 households in 9 of 13 affected districts were surveyed.