

Experience of Post Disaster Recovery from Gender Perspective – Shifting from Vulnerabilities to Capacities¹

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 Chinavererapatnam village informed the Fire and Rescue Department when fire broke out. The taskforce in Chinnakalpet 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

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.

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.

Source: Adapted from SHARMA, Kalpana, "Man-Made Disasters", *The Hindu*, India's National Newspaper, on-line edition, 24 February 2002, <http://www.gdnonline.org/sourcebook>

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

