Gender-Sensitive Post-Disaster Rehabilitation Guidance:

Empowerment

1.1 Training & Education

Women are informal and formal educators who provide vital links between households and emergency responders, and whose social networks make them effective trainers in community-based technical assistance projects. Attention needs to be directed at girls who are at risk of leaving school early after disasters and at the many women who are unable to work because of child-care and other responsibilities.

- Give priority to the restoration of pre-school and child-care centres, schools, and community education programmes targeting women and girls.
- Monitor short- and long-term effects of injury, displacement, and rehabilitation on girls’ access to school (be attentive to relief projects that don’t target school attendance).
- Monitor job programmes to avoid training that promotes gender stereotypes and which limits rather than expands women’s options; offer non-traditional training to men.
- Use a variety of media and all community languages to ensure that all community members have access to recovery information.
- Capitalise on women’s local knowledge about vulnerable members of the village, neighbourhood, and community and about coping strategies in past disasters.
- Provide on-the-job training to women to take up decision-making roles in professional and government outreach projects.
Box 3.5: Pakistan Earthquake

Prioritizing the needs of women and ensuring equity in reconstruction planning

Serious gender disparities existed in the affected areas before the earthquake. Both the government and the international humanitarian community have the responsibility to address these disparities, through the reconstruction process. For instance, massive gender gaps existed in education prior to the earthquake in NWFP, with male gross enrolment rates standing at 97 per cent, while the female rate was only 56 per cent — the largest gender gap of any province in Pakistan. Reconstruction provides an opportunity to increase the access of girls and women to quality education and health facilities. Resources for the expanded provision of teacher training for women, by the Government of Pakistan, may help to ensure that quality education is available to meet the demand for it. There was a serious shortage of female teachers even before the earthquake and, given the large number of teachers killed during the earthquake, this situation is likely to be worse now.

A gender audit of the reconstruction plans should take place, with recommendations shared and a clear strategy outlined to ensure that the needs of women are given the highest priority in the allocation of resources. Internationally recognized human rights frameworks can act as guiding benchmarks for evaluating, through a gender lens, the plans for reconstruction and rehabilitation. (Oxfam International, 2006)

1.2 Physical and Mental Health

Although women’s health is vital to the well-being of their families after disasters, as caregivers they tend to place their needs last. Reproductive health needs are essential, as are women’s heightened risk of sexual/domestic violence.

- Antenatal and postnatal care and nutritional supplements must be made available to pregnant and lactating women.
- Mobile health services should include reproductive and family planning services.
Older women should be targeted in public health campaigns to capture their needs as well as to draw on their knowledge in relevant areas.

Mental health training and care must be provided to all women and men at risk of post-traumatic stress.

1.3 Empowerment

Women’s local knowledge and expertise are essential assets for households and communities struggling to rebuild. In order to capture their capacities, disaster responders need to work closely with them in ways that empower and develop their self-determination.

- Integrate disaster mitigation initiatives into ongoing community activities and concerns, if possible partnering with local women.
- Ensure that women who are knowledgeable about women’s issues are proportionally represented when key decisions are made about the distribution and use of relief funds and available government funds.
- Plan for ongoing and long-term consultations with local women’s groups in affected areas. Identify and develop relations with women’s advocacy groups. Strengthen or develop informal social networks that link these groups with disaster response agencies and offices.
- Organise reconstruction planning meetings and pay attention to women’s ability to participate by providing child-care, transportation, holding the meeting at a time convenient to the women, etc.
- Monitor and respond to women’s need for legal services in the areas of housing, employment, and family relations.
- Monitor relief and rehabilitation services for gender bias and inequalities (unintentional burdening of women’s work, etc).
- Monitor, as far as possible, the degree to which relief and rehabilitation assets are equally distributed within the household.