

Why Gender Issues in Recovery Are Important?

1.1 Recovery Cannot Be Resilient without Addressing Gender issues

Gender shapes the disaster experience and the ability to recover. It explains why certain groups of people are at greater risk or why some others recover at a slower pace. Since gender plays an important role in assigning roles and responsibilities within groups and in determining the access to and control of resources among groups, gender sensitivity and gender aspect become a valid and important policy domain during disasters and throughout the rehabilitation, recovery and reconstruction process. (WBI, 2009)

Gender mainstreaming is a key strategy to reduce inequalities among gender groups. Mainstreaming gender into disaster management strengthens the resilience of entire communities, cuts recovery time, and leads to more efficient recovery and reconstruction. It can be achieved by taking into account the needs, concerns and capacities of gender groups in planning and implementing disaster reduction and risk management activities. (WBI, 2009)

1.2 Gender and Post Disaster Window of Opportunity

In post-disaster literature, the idea of turning the adversity of the disaster into an opportunity for achieving development is increasingly recognized (IFRC 2006). It is believed to be of importance for a successful disaster recovery to seize this “window of opportunity”¹. In post-tsunami literature from Sri Lanka it is emphasized how the tsunami aftermath has provided an opportunity for women to partake in decisions that affect their lives (Prasad N.d.). They have been offered the opportunity of participating in the rebuilding of their families and the society (ibid). Successive International Recovery Forums of 2008 and 2009, have emphasized that “Build Back Better”² strategy provides a “window of opportunity” not only aiming at rebuilding of bricks and buildings but also seeking to change society in a positive way.

¹ Window of opportunity refers to the idea of utilizing the aftermath of a disaster to bring about an improved situation compared to the pre-disaster conditions (IRIN 2006; IFRC 2006). It can be in terms of bringing the poor out of poverty, empowering women, etc.

² It is a new kind of recovery that not only restores what existed previously, but goes beyond, seizing the moral, political, managerial, and financial opportunities the crisis has offered governments to set communities on a better and safer development path (IRP 2007).



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1. What Are Gender Concerns in Recovery

1.1 Gender Dimension in Post Disaster

1.1.1 The Gender Perspective

Gender roles and cultural contexts ensure that in both the household and in the community, women and men often have distinct roles, responsibilities, and differential access to a range of social, economic, and political resources. These in turn shape their ability to prepare for and protect themselves from disaster. An understanding of these gender-differentiated situations and the priorities they can give rise to can play a vital role in strengthening disaster prevention, relief, and rehabilitation work. This can be achieved by helping to develop culturally- and gender-appropriate protection and mitigation strategies that are grounded in the coping strategies, knowledge, and energy of local communities. A gender perspective can also play a valuable part in highlighting the contributions men and women, as members of communities most susceptible to hazards, can and do play in strengthening resilience to disasters at the local level.

Looking at people as gendered beings thus provides an essential lens through which to see how the fact of being male or female – coupled with other intersecting ‘social fault lines’ – has a great deal to do with their ability to cope with and ‘bounce back’ from the effects of disasters. In particular, gender analysis provides the following:

- Illuminates the gender inequalities that render women and girls more susceptible to the risks and outcomes of natural disasters and helps to address future vulnerabilities by providing livelihood assistance to those who are most vulnerable
- Helps to ensure that resources reach the people most in need, women and men alike
- Ensures a greater likelihood of providing culturally- and gender-appropriate resources and services (i.e., housing, foodstuff, clothing, and other personal needs)
- Recognizes the vital role local capacities play in preparing for and responding to Disasters

In 2007, UNDP launched an Eight Point Agenda for Women’s Empowerment and Gender Equality in Crisis Prevention and Recovery. The action plan offers a comprehensive approach to address the needs of women and girls in crisis and gives them a voice in the recovery process.

Five of the eight points are relevant to disaster risk reduction and recovery contexts:

- Strengthen women's security in crisis: Stop violence against women;
- Expand women's citizenship, participation and leadership: Advance women as decision-makers;
- Promote gender equality in disaster risk reduction: Help women and men build back better;
- Ensure gender-responsive recovery: Promote women as leaders of recovery; and
- Develop capacities for social change: Work together to transform society.

(UNDP, 2008)

2.1.2 Elements of Post- Disaster Situations and Their Possible Gender Dimensions

*The UNDP publication of Disaster Risk Management Program (India) Indicates Elements of Post Disaster Situations and Possible Gender Dimensions:*³

The following are some of the significant post disaster impact on women in rehabilitation phase:

Basic needs: During Rehabilitation phase⁴, the affected families need basic amenities like shelter, sanitary arrangements, drinking water, electricity, transportation, and communication. Some of the amenities like sanitation and drinking water are transformed into specific gender needs. Traditionally, Indian villages are not adequately equipped with sanitary arrangements and, hence, this need is not fulfilled during the interim process.

Drinking water: The critical issue is that of drinking water as, fetching the water is considered to be a woman's duty. The unavailability or inadequacy of clean, potable drinking water not only increases the work burden on women but also jeopardizes their productive activities. This is also true of fuel. Relief items do not necessarily consist of wood or any other fuel. This need has to be fulfilled immediately of the affected families are to resume their moral life.

Employment: Another practical need is employment. The employment needs in the post disaster situation are critical as traditional means and sources are destroyed. Most of the relief and rehabilitation activities, particularly those related to building and construction of infrastructure, are male centered and

³ Patricia L. Delaney & Elizabeth Shrader, LCSPG/LAC Gender Team, The World Bank, January 2000

⁴ UNDP, India, "Training of Trainers Manual on Gender Mainstreaming in Disaster Risk Management", June 2008

male-intensive. Women do not receive adequate employment in these activities. At the same time, specific employment generation programs for women are neither undertaken nor conceived.

Literacy: Another handicap is the low level of literacy among women and subsequent lack of exposure to outside world. The women get confounded after the disaster, especially when they are accommodated in relief camps outside villages or taken to hospitals at far off places. They are at a loss after being discharged from the hospitals, as they cannot easily reach their homes. The lack of exposure to communication and transportation links creates these disadvantages.

Malnourished status: women's malnourished status and nutritional deficiencies pose a handicap in post-disaster situations, especially in post-operative or convalescent stages and also in the wake of epidemics.

Medical treatment: although, no discrimination is made in administering professional medical treatment, women might feel uncomfortable to be treated by a male doctor and might thus not request the necessary treatment. In addition the injured or convalescing women do not get the mandatory rest or respite from domestic chores. They are not only expected to look after their homes but also care for the injured or hospitalized relatives.

Schools: during the relief and rehabilitation phases, schools are reopened but it is observed that girl-students often drop out of this stage. Conventionally, the proportion of girls dropping out of schools is high, especially among poor, laboring classes. Their vulnerability increases manifold after the disasters.

According to UN-HABITAT Elements of Post-Crisis Situations and Possible Gender Dimensions⁵ are:

- 1) **Abuse and discrimination:** In the post-crisis phase blatant discrimination might again (or still) be prevalent, as box 2.1 shows.

⁵ UN-HABITAT, Human Settlements in Crisis, "GENDER AND POST-CRISIS RECONSTRUCTION", 2007



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Box 2.1: Gender Perspectives During and After the Tsunami Disaster

The statistics indicate that in Aceh, India and Sri Lanka more women died in the tsunami than men, almost 80% of the dead are women. The tsunami has not only killed more women, it has produced some very gender-specific aftershocks, ranging from women giving birth in unsafe conditions to increased cases of rape and abuse. In Sri Lanka, dead bodies were sexually abused and women were dragged out of the rushing water and raped as payment for being saved. In Thailand, women are discriminated even in death: the government assistance for funerals provides twice as much as money for a man's death than for a woman's. Source: ASIA PACIFIC FORUM ON WOMEN, LAW AND DEVELOPMENT

(APWLD), *Why Are Women More Vulnerable During Disasters? Violations of Women's Human Rights in the Tsunami Aftermath*, APWLD, 2005, p. 3,

<http://www.gdnonline.org/sourcebook/chapt/ind.php?id=7>

2) Demographic changes

Population compositions are imbalanced as a result of disaster or violent conflict, e.g. either a disproportionate amount of women die as a result of disaster or widows and orphans are particularly numerous as a result of armed conflict. In most cases demographic changes do not mean increased social, political or economic authority for women.

3) Ownership rights

In the wake of disaster, women's rights might deteriorate, as husbands have died and ownership is patrilineal. Box 2.2 exemplifies such a case.

Box 2.2: Women's Access to Land after the Tsunami Disaster

The tsunami exacerbated the problems associated with women's access to land. Women in Aceh and India do not have ownership rights to land registered to their husband and father's names as women are not recognised as head of household. In Thailand, the tsunami has created new land conflicts with big businesses claiming the land of entire communities, especially of minorities, who have lived on that land for several generations but never had the land titles.

Source: ASIA PACIFIC FORUM ON WOMEN, LAW AND DEVELOPMENT

(APWLD), *Why Are Women More Vulnerable During Disasters? Violations of Women's Human Rights in the Tsunami Aftermath*, APWLD, 2005, p. 4,

<http://www.gdnonline.org/sourcebook/chapt/ind.php?id=7>



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4) **Economic recovery**

Women often recover more slowly from economic loss than men, as they are more house-bound and more overloaded with the responsibility for a variety of tasks including child care, emergency response and mitigation of family conflicts. Additionally, women often fail to receive equitable financial recovery assistance from the government or external actors.

5) **Unstable monetary and fiscal situation**

High inflation, a weak and poorly managed banking system, and an unstable currency will hurt particularly small scale business owners, many of which are women.

6) **Environmental damage**

Disaster debris, toxic agents, landmines, unexploded ordnances (UXOs) and infrastructural damage are likely to mean that agricultural production is low. As traditionally a high percentage of women work the land, the effect on their economic well-being is more pronounced than on men.

7) **Political negotiations**

Men's and women's participation in these processes tends to vary, with women often playing only minor roles in formal negotiations or policy making.

8) **Informal political participation and organization**

Women as sole earners of income during the disaster or conflict periods have learned to gain greater confidence in organized networks and see benefits of working with other women. Gender specific networks might exclude men.

9) **Societal trauma**

Many men suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder. Societal trauma can lead to psychosocial degeneration of society, including new maladaptive patterns such as crime, domestic violence, prostitution, and alcohol and drug abuse, all of which have an affect on gender relations.

10) **Media used to communicate messages**

Men's and women's access to media may differ, and may mean that only a predominantly male view is represented and discussed

11) International investments in employment creation, health care, etc

Reconstruction programmes may not recognize or give priority to gender parity. Favouring men over women as target groups may result in widening the gap between the sexes rather than closing it.

12) Measures to increase the capacity of and confidence in civil society

Women's and men's participation in community organizations and NGOs is generally uneven. These organizations often lack the capacity and interest in granting priority to equality issues.

(Source: UN-HABITAT, 2007)

1.2 Six Principles for Engendered Relief and Reconstruction⁶

1.2.1 Think big

Gender equality and risk reduction principles must guide all aspects of Disaster mitigation, response and reconstruction. The “window of opportunity” for change and political organization closes very quickly.

Plan now to:

- respond in ways that empower women and local communities
 - rebuild in ways that address the root causes of vulnerability, including gender and social inequalities
 - create meaningful opportunities for women's participation and leadership
 - fully engage local women in hazard mitigation and vulnerability assessment projects
 - ensure that women benefit from economic recovery and income support programs, e.g. access, fair wages, nontraditional skills training, child care/social support
- give priority to social services, children's support systems, women's centers, women's “corners” in camps and other safe spaces
- take practical steps to empower women, among others:
 - consult fully with women in design and operation of emergency shelter
 - deed newly constructed houses in both names
 - include women in housing design as well as construction
 - promote land rights for women
 - provide income-generation projects that build nontraditional skills
 - fund women's groups to monitor disaster recovery projects

⁶ Adapted from Gender And Disaster Network January 2005

1.2.2 Get the facts

Gender analysis is not optional or divisive but imperative to direct aid and plan for full and equitable recovery. Nothing in disaster work is “gender neutral.” Plan now to:

- collect and solicit gender-specific data
- train and employ women in community-based assessment and follow-up research
- tap women’s knowledge of environmental resources and community complexity
- identify and assess sex-specific needs, e.g. for home-based women workers, men’s mental health, displaced and migrating women vs. men
- track the (explicit/implicit) gender budgeting of relief and response funds
- track the distribution of goods, services, opportunities to women and men
- assess the short- and long-term impacts on women/men of all disaster initiatives
- monitor change over time and in different contexts

1.2.3 Work with Grassroots Women

Women’s community organizations have insight, information, experience, networks, and resources vital to increasing disaster resilience. Work with and develop the capacities of existing women’s groups such as:

- women’s groups experienced in disasters
- women and development NGOs; women’s environmental action groups
- advocacy groups with a focus on girls and women, e.g. peace activists
- women’s neighborhood groups
- faith-based and service organizations
- professional women, e.g. educators, scientists, emergency managers

2.2.4 Resist Stereotypes

Base all initiatives on knowledge of difference and specific cultural, economic, political, and sexual contexts, not on false generalities:

- women survivors are vital first responders and rebuilders, not passive victims
- mothers, grandmothers and other women are vital to children’s survival and recovery but women’s needs may differ from children’s
- not all women are mothers or live with men
- women-led households are not necessarily the poorest or most vulnerable
- women are not economic dependents but producers, community workers, earners
- gender norms put boys and men at risk too, e.g. mental health, risk-taking, accident
- targeting women for services is not always effective or desirable but can produce backlash



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or violence

- marginalized women (e.g. undocumented, HIV/AIDS, low caste, indigenous, sex workers) have unique perspectives and capacities
- no “one-size” fits all: culturally specific needs and desires must be respected, e.g. women’s traditional religious practices, clothing, personal hygiene, privacy norms

2.2.5 Take a Human Rights Approach

Democratic and participatory initiatives serve women and girls best. Women and men alike must be assured of the conditions of life needed to enjoy their fundamental human rights, as well as simply survive. Girls and women in crisis are at increased risk of:

- sexual harassment and rape
- abuse by intimate partners, e.g. in the months and year following a major disaster
- exploitation by traffickers, e.g. into domestic, agricultural and sex work
- erosion or loss of existing land rights
- early/forced marriage
- forced migration
- reduced or lost access to reproductive health care services
- male control over economic recovery resources

2.2.6 Respect and Develop the Capacities of Women

Avoid overburdening women with already heavy workloads and family responsibilities likely to increase.

- identify and support women’s contributions to informal early warning systems, school and home preparedness, community solidarity, socio emotional recovery, extended family care
- materially compensate the time, energy and skill of grassroots women who are able and willing to partner with disaster organizations
- provide child care, transportation and other support as needed to enable women’s full and equal participation in planning a more disaster resilient future



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