

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

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.

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.

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.

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 created 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 2006.³ In Somalia, UNIFEM is giving support to the women's ministry to collect gender-sensitive data.

Source: UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT FUND FOR WOMEN (UNIFEM), *Creating Policy Space – Bringing Women's Perspectives to Decision Makers*, 2005, <http://www.unifem.org/campaigns/tsunami/page6.html>

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.