

THEMATIC BACKGROUND PAPER - TECHNICAL SESSION

Addressing the Inequality of Risk and Promoting Women’s Leadership in Recovery

Crises around the world are multiplying and becoming more complex and protracted. In 2019, nearly 132 million people across the world will need humanitarian assistance and protection¹. Disasters affect 350 million people on average each year and cause billions of dollars of damage, while conflicts drive 80% of all humanitarian needs, and reduce gross domestic product (GDP) growth by two percentage points per year, on average.

Crises, including conflicts and disasters, affect people – women, girls, boys and men – differently.

Disasters aggravate and maintain gender inequalities.

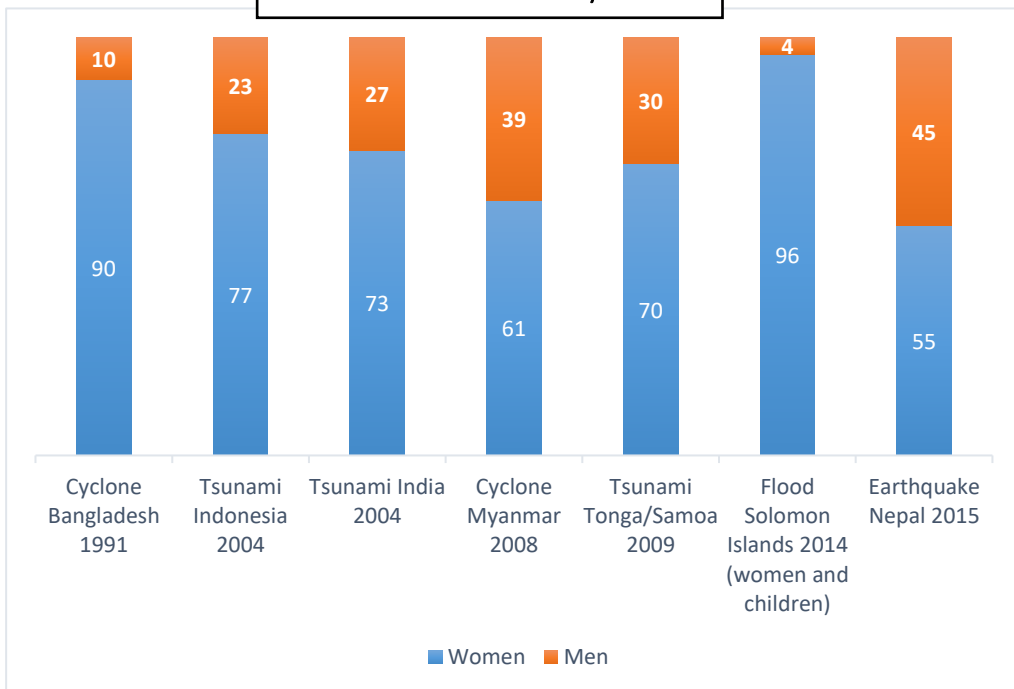
Women’s capacity and leadership in disaster risk reduction (DRR) as well as their essential role in the community are not fully considered.

Patriarchal culture and norms impede and restrict women’s role as community leaders and agents of change. Some

societies segregate women and regard them as care and food providers². Due to preexisting socio-economic conditions, social norms and beliefs, as well as traditional practices, women and girls are disproportionately affected. They also have different and uneven levels of resilience and capacity to recover. When disasters and conflicts strike, gender inequalities are often exacerbated, and this leads to increased levels of gender-based violence, reduced access to livelihood resources, and to greater levels of mortality.

When the socio-economic status is high, the mortality rate for men and women during and after a disaster is roughly the same, which demonstrates that gender inequality and disaster mortality and

Figure 1 – Female versus male disaster mortality



¹UN OCHA. 2019. Global Humanitarian Overview 2019.

² Kinkini Hemachandrar, Dilanthi Amaraturgaa and Richard Haigh. 2017. Role of women in disaster risk governance.

vulnerability are intrinsically linked³. Figure 1 shows that women are more prone to die during cyclones, tsunamis, floods, or earthquakes, than men.

Women are often excluded from life-saving services and decision-making processes as a result of discriminatory social norms. Additionally, women and girls face increased unpaid care work, which increases their pre-disaster vulnerability comparatively to men. For instance, in Vanuatu, 80 per cent of women spend on average 27.2 hours per week on unpaid work, while 20 per cent of men spend 6.6 hours on unpaid work per week⁴. This has a detrimental effect on women since they have less time to complete other activities which could build their resilience and disaster preparedness, including being involved in the economic and political life of their community or country.

In addition, women's unpaid care work dramatically increases after disasters, hampering their ability to recover from disasters as well as leading to the reduction of their share in productive activities. For instance, in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria in Dominica, it was observed that elderly women are the ones completing most of the care work in the evacuation shelters, spending at least 18 hours per week, which represented a significant increase since the hurricane.⁵ Furthermore, in the case of earthquake in El Salvador, it was discovered that *"one of the consequences of a disaster is the decapitalization of women and the reduction of their share of productive activities in the formal and informal sectors"*⁶. Following the earthquake, the amount of direct damages caused to women, which includes housing, furniture and appliances, in the private sector, reached 300.8 million dollars. And, the amount of indirect damages, which refers to the loss of employment outside the home and income as well as increase in the reproductive work, reached 414.4 million dollars.⁷

Agriculture-based societies can easily face adverse effects from disasters. Natural hazards, such as droughts and floods, lower agricultural production, and can cause damage and loss of crops and livestock. According to FAO, *"between 2005 and 2014, approximately USD 93 billion was lost in crop and livestock production due to natural hazards and disasters in developing countries"*⁸. In Sub-Saharan Africa, women perform most agricultural activities. They make up over 60% of the agricultural labour force and contribute to the production of most of the food produced on the continent⁹. However, women farmers have fewer access to and ownership of for agriculture essential resources, such as land. In 2010, only 15% of land in sub-Saharan Africa was owned by women, even though access to land provides an important source of resilience for women who may lack other options to adapt to the effects of climate change related disasters¹⁰ and conflict. When employment is informal and land is

³ UN Women. 2016. Time to Act on Gender, Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Government of the Commonwealth of Dominica. 2017. Post-Disaster Needs Assessment Hurricane Maria.

⁶ Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe. 2002. Section five- The impact of a disaster on women. In Handbook for estimating the socio- economic and environmental effects of disasters (pp. 45-55). ECLAC and International Bank for Reconstruction Development (The World Bank).

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ FAO. 2017. The impact of disasters on agriculture Addressing the information gap.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Global Gender and Climate Alliance (GGCA). 2016. Gender and Climate Change in Africa; FACTS FROM GENDER AND CLIMATE CHANGE: A CLOSER LOOK AT EXISTING EVIDENCE.

not owned both social protection and disaster compensation are weak, which heightens women's exposure and vulnerability to disasters on the African continent.

Women make up a disproportionate percentage of workers in the informal sector, which leaves them often without any protection, social benefits, insurance or disaster compensation¹¹. *"In South Asia, over 80 per cent of women in non-agricultural jobs are in informal employment; in sub-Saharan Africa, 74 per cent; and in Latin America and the Caribbean, 54 per cent"*¹². Women are seldom compensated for their loss and tend to have a harder time to recover their livelihoods, especially when their major source of income is in the informal agricultural sector. Many disasters such as cyclones, floods, droughts or hurricanes have adverse consequences on access to drinking water, combustion materials and other food products.

Moreover, countries affected by crises often lack access to recovery and reconstruction plans that protect women from sexual violence and insecurity. In fact, such plans often ignore women's health and economic needs. The increase of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in the aftermath of crises remains largely underexplored and thus unaddressed, though it is frequent and substantial. In 2011 in Vanuatu *"after two tropical cyclones hit Tafea, the southern province of Vanuatu, the Tanna Women's Counselling Centre experienced a 300 percent increase in new domestic violence cases (Kilsby and Rosenbaum, 2012)"*¹³. In Malawi, disaster put women, girls and other vulnerable groups at risk as they are subjected to sexual abuse and exploitation¹⁴. The destruction of properties and means of subsistence has an adverse impact on the affected populations. As such, in order to survive, some people, make dangerous and hard decisions such as engaging in prostitution, thefts, dropping out of school, early marriages, and child labor¹⁵.

Although crises reinforce, perpetuate and increase gender inequalities, at the same time, crises can also be an opportunity for shifts in gender roles, leading to new responsibilities and opportunities for women and men in economic decisions and activity, political engagement and community arbitration. A 2018 study on women's empowerment and disaster shows that after the 2010 Chile earthquake and tsunami, the evacuation procedures and managing strategies were gendered¹⁶. Men were responsible for the operations and relief strategies, while women covered more traditional duties, such as securing food and concentrating on family care and survival. However, with time, women's role expanded as *"they had to prepare provisions for 170 families. This was an opportunity to make women's domestic role more visible and change their vulnerable position of housewife to a more active community role which increased women's perception of self-value"*¹⁷. During the emergency period from March to June 2010, women's role and weight in the community increased and their resilience contributed to coping with the hard living-conditions in camps. One woman called Maria came out as a leader. She managed

¹¹ UN Women, Progress of the World's Women 2015-2016. Chapter 2, p. 71.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ UN Women. 2016. Time to Act on Gender, Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction.

¹⁴ MALAWI GOVERNMENT. 2015. Malawi 2015 Floods Post Disaster Needs Assessment Report.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Moreno, J., & Shaw, D. (2018). Women's empowerment following disaster: a longitudinal study of social change. *Natural Hazards*, 92(1), 2015-224.

¹⁷ Ibid.

the community kitchen and brought back order among people after the tsunami in Chile. Women's resilience carried on improving due to Maria's leadership and despite fierce criticism from neighbours, especially men¹⁸.

However, in spite of those women's actual and potential contributions, including their leadership as first responders, as well as their central role in community stability and resilience, women continue to be largely ignored in the design and implementation of crisis recovery and peacebuilding programming. Local and national women's movements and organizations, whether involved at the community or national level are often most knowledgeable of the specific needs and capacities of women and men in remote disaster/conflict prone and/or affected regions. Despite this, women are generally absent from the development of DRR and peace building strategies and decision-making processes and when present, their voices are seldom heard.

While there is a plethora of normative commitments recognizing the importance of gender-responsive DRR, recovery and peacebuilding, significant gaps remain in their implementation. This is, among others, exemplified by lack of funding. Despite important progress, the review of the Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Gender Marker Codes in 2015 indicated that only 35 per cent of proposals considered gender issues, while over 60 per cent of the projects were either gender blind, or addressed weakly the distinct needs of women, girls, boys and men.

Similarly, the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda stemming from the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and the implementation of the Sendai Framework for DRR have been uneven in focus, prioritizing some areas of action, such as protecting women from sexual violence, over others. Little attention has been paid to addressing the structural inequalities that perpetuate exclusion and undermine recovery, sustainable peace and development¹⁹. This is also the case regarding elements of these agendas that could create meaningful opportunities for women's political, social and economic empowerment in the long term.

Little has been translated into concrete plans in order to tackle the marginalization of women as active agents and knowledge bearers. This is explained by the fact that from 2009-2011, 62 from 70 reporting countries during the mid-term review of the Hyogo Framework of Action did not compile gender-disaggregated vulnerability and capacity information. There is a lack of sex and age disaggregated data (SADD) and gender-sensitive analysis to support DRR policy formulation and action. In addition to that, institutionalization of gender equality capacity in DRR/ peace building governance is weak. "In 2012-13, only 2% of all aid to peace and security in fragile states and economies targeted gender equality as a principal objective²⁰". Insufficient attention is given to building women's resilience, which in turn weakens community resilience. An analysis of the Post-Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) of the past

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Article 36(a)(i) of the Sendai Framework stipulates: "Women and their participation are critical to effectively managing disaster risk and designing, resourcing and implementing gender-sensitive disaster risk reduction policies, plans and programmes; and adequate capacity building measures need to be taken to empower women for preparedness as well as build their capacity for alternate livelihood means in post-disaster situations".

²⁰ OECD. 2015. Financing UN Security Council Resolution 1325: Aid in support of gender equality and women's rights in fragile contexts



five years highlights that less than 33 percent include reference to gender issues and even fewer of this translate into concrete budget allocations in recovery frameworks²¹. Finally, there is a lack of substantive women's participation and leadership in DRR. Women seldom participate in the assessment, design, setting up, monitoring and assessment of DRR processes.

The international community thus urgently needs to redistribute responsibilities so that women are empowered to face crises differently and contribute to recovery from crisis and to building resilience in leadership roles that are equal to those of men.

Drivers to achieve substantial advancements to empower women in DRR and resilience building rely on various elements that stem from furthering women's inclusion and leadership in risk reduction and recovery, developing capacity and capability for DRR, ensuring humanitarian safety nets and social justice, as well as partnering with NGOs, private sector, associations and academia²². At a 2019 Conference on Women and Security, Ms. Marita Sørheim-Rensvik, Norway's special envoy for women, peace and security, argued that *"we need to address challenges women face. We need to consider power, gender and stereotypes, support education systems, ensure that schools are safe and promote women's political empowerment and involvement. If women are empowered during a crisis they will be part in the mediation process"*²³. Similarly, if women are empowered before, during and after crises, they will be effective and essential agents of change and will contribute meaningfully and decisively to the resilience and recovery process.

²¹ Only one-third of PDNA listed in GFDRR has reference to gender. <https://www.gfdrr.org/en/post-disaster-needs-assessments>

²² UNISDR. 2009. Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction Risk and poverty in a changing climate, Invest today for a safer tomorrow.

²³ *"Women's participation and leadership: a red thread across the Peace and Security and Humanitarian agenda"*, co-organized by UN Women, the Permanent Mission of Norway and the Norwegian Envoy for Women, Peace and Security, Ms. Marita Sørheim-Rensvik. April 2019