CHAPTER 4
DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT:
A GENDER-SENSITIVE APPROACH
IS A SMART APPROACH

“Disaster risk reduction that delivers gender equality is a cost-effective win-win option for reducing vulnerability and sustaining the livelihoods of whole communities.”

—Margareta Wahlström, UN Assistant Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction, et al.

Women and girls, who account for over half of the 200 million people affected annually by natural disasters, are typically at greater risk from natural hazards than men – particularly in low-income countries and among the poor. Natural disasters and climate change often exacerbate existing inequalities and discrimination, including those that are gender-based, and can lead to new forms of discrimination.

The term “gender” refers to the socially-constructed roles, behaviors, activities and attributes that a society considers appropriate for a person based on his or her assigned sex at birth. Understanding the gender implications and facets of natural disasters and climate change is critical to effective disaster risk management practices that enable communities and countries to be disaster resilient. All women, men, girls and boys do not face the same needs and vulnerabilities in the face of natural disasters and climate change; there are differences within each group and between individuals regarding specific protection concerns and capacities – for example, people with mental or physical disabilities, minorities and indigenous populations, the elderly, chronically ill, unaccompanied children, child-headed household, female-headed households, widows, etc. – and over time throughout the disaster and post-disaster phases. Various factors, including social, economic, ethnic,
cultural and physiological factors, affect not only the ways that disasters impact women, men, girls and boys, but also their coping strategies and their participation in prevention, relief, recovery and reconstruction processes.

Women play significant roles in all stages of disaster and climate risk management; they are often at the frontline as responders and bring valuable resources to disaster and climate risk reduction and recovery. However, the important roles or potential roles women take on are often not recognized, and women themselves “are largely marginalized in the development of DRR policy and decision-making processes and their voices go unheard.”

Yet, in most crisis situations, women and children account for the majority of those affected (e.g., more than 75 percent of those displaced by natural disasters, and typically 70 to 80 percent of those needing assistance in emergency situations). Moreover, global pressures of urbanization have particular implications for men and women in both urban and rural communities. As the frequency and severity of hydro-meteorological hazards due to climate change are predicted to increase, it is important to understand the relationship between gender and disasters.

Women serve their communities as leaders in ways that often go unrecognized by national governments and international organizations. While they may not hold positions of visible political leadership (for example, as mayors), women are key to a society’s social fabric and hence, its capacity for resilience. They shape behavior and transmit culture and knowledge through kin and social networks, which are critical to risk prevention and response efforts. They help to rebuild their communities after disasters strike. Women often serve as teachers, nurses and social workers and as such are well-placed to assess community needs and implement disaster relief and recovery programs. Women’s leadership in civil society organizations can provide the potential for their participation in more formal processes of DRR, response and recovery efforts.

In addition, it is important to note the important economic role women play, and how disasters and climate change can impact their economic well-being and that of their


272 See for example: Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), Special Report on Managing the Risks of Extreme Events and Disasters to Advance Climate Change Adaptation (SREX), November 2011, www.ipcc.ch/publications_and_data/publications_and_data_reports.shtml

273 In another context, research found that women’s groups played important roles in at least some peace processes even though women were not officially at the ‘negotiating table.’ See: Brookings-Bern Project on internal Displacement, Addressing Internal Displacement in Peace Processes, Peace Agreements and Peace-Building, September 2007, www.brookings.edu/idp
families. Even though women often face inequitable access to control over resources and income generation opportunities, disaster and climate risk management must take into account the important economic contributions of women and how they are, or might be, affected by disasters. As a United Nations Environment Programme study explains:

“Women play a critical role in agricultural and pastoral livelihoods, often bearing significant responsibility for managing critical productive resources such as land, water, livestock, biodiversity, fodder, fuel, and food. They also contribute work and energy towards income generation and carry out a disproportional amount of daily labour compared to men in household and community spheres, such as cooking, cleaning, child care, care of older or sick family members, providing work for collective projects and during weddings, funerals and other cultural ceremonies.”

Gender dimensions of natural disasters have gained increasing recognition at the international level since the 1990s. Initial strategies for disaster risk reduction developed for the 1990-2000 International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction failed to include specific gender components. However, much progress has since been made to mainstream gender in disaster risk reduction (DRR) policies and programs, particularly since 2001, due to the engagement of UNDP, UNISDR and other UN agencies – such as UNIFEM, the UN Commission on the Status of Women – international financial organizations and regional and civil society organizations. Gender is a cross-cutting principle of the Hyogo Framework for Action 2000-2015: on Building Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disaster, which states that: “A gender perspective should be integrated into all disaster risk management policies, plans and decision making processes, including those related to risk assessment, early warning, information management and education and training.” In addition, the Beijing Agenda for Global Action on Gender-Sensitive Disaster Risk Reduction (2009), adopted following the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled “Women 2000: Gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century,” calls for gender-sensitive approaches to disaster prevention, mitigation and recovery strategies and natural disaster assistance.

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274 On climate change impacts, see further the below section: “Understanding Gender-Based Vulnerabilities.”


277 For further examples and analysis, see: UNISDR, UNDP and IUCN, Making Disaster Risk Reduction Gender-Sensitive: Policy and Practical Guidelines, 2009, www.unisdr.org/we/inform/publications/9922

More generally, the UN system has taken action toward achieving gender equality, such as by adopting the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1979 and the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995 at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, which established gender mainstreaming as a global strategy for the promotion of gender equality.279 It also recognized that “…many women are also particularly affected by environmental disasters, serious and infectious diseases and various forms of violence against women,” and called on governments to implement various actions to guard against and address these issues.280 Building on the Beijing Platform for Action, in 1997, the UN system began to work towards mainstreaming gender perspectives into all of its policies and programs, at all levels, which “…has provided an enabling environment for gender mainstreaming in DRR.”281 Reflecting this push toward gender mainstreaming in disaster risk management, many UN agencies and organizations have developed guidelines and manuals for a gender-based approach to disaster management.282 However, the challenges lie in translating policy into effective practice. In addition, there is still much to be done to integrate gender-sensitive approaches into national legislation and policies for disaster and climate risk management. Moreover, there is broad recognition, if not a consensus, that gains in disaster and climate risk management are predicated on effectively addressing underlying gender inequities, and that disasters can open up opportunities to improve pre-disaster gender and other inequities.283 Participation is one area in which inequities must be addressed for gains in risk reduction. As Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General (SRSG) for Disaster Risk Reduction Margareta Wahlström remarked on the occasion of the International Day for Disaster Reduction, which focused on women and girls: “Countries that do not actively promote the full participation of women in education, politics, and the workforce will struggle more than most when it comes to reducing risk and adapting to climate change.”284


281 Citation from UNISDR et al., *Making Disaster Risk Reduction Gender-Sensitive: Policy and Practical Guidelines*, 2009, p. 7.


In this chapter, we examine some of the gender-related vulnerabilities and capacities in natural disasters, why it is important to adopt a gender-based strategy for planning and response, what a gender-based approach to disaster management looks like, and recommendations to relevant actors.

**SECTION 1**
Understanding Gender-Based Vulnerabilities

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**IASC Operational Guidelines on the Protection of Persons in Situations of Natural Disasters**

*Protection of Women—Cross-References to Relevant Guidelines*

**Guideline(s) Topic**

- **I.1** Non-discrimination
- **I.3** Participation and consultation
- **I.8** Protection activities to be prioritized on the basis of assessed needs
- **A.1.1** Protection of life, physical integrity and health of persons exposed to imminent risks
- **A.4.1** Special attention to protection against violence, including in camps and collective centers during and after the emergency
- **A.4.2** Protection against gender-based violence
- **A.4.3** Protection against trafficking, child labor, contemporary forms of slavery
- **A.5.2** Security and protection in camps and collective centers
- **B.1.1 – B.1.2** Access to and adequate provision of humanitarian goods and services
- **B.1.4** Addressing gender-specific roles in humanitarian action
- **B.2.1** Including women in planning, design and implementation of food distribution
- **B.2.2** Safety in accessing sanitation facilities in camps and collective shelters
- **B.2.3** Adequate shelter addressing the specific needs
- **B.2.5** Special attention to health needs of women
- **B.2.6** Equal access to education
- **C.1.5** Assistance in (re-)claiming property and acquiring deeds in one’s own name
- **C.2.3** Consultation and participation in planning and implementation of shelter and housing programs
- **C.3.1 – C.3.2** Access to livelihoods and skills training
- **D.1.1** Equal access to documentation issued in one’s own name
- **D.4.1** Feedback on disaster response
Women are typically more vulnerable than men to the effects of natural disasters and climate change, not only because of biological and physiological differences, but also, notably, because of socioeconomic differences and inequitable power relations.285 As a result, in most cases, mortality rates in disasters are higher – sometimes much higher – for women than for men. Women seem to have higher mortality rates in countries where their enjoyment of economic and social rights is low. Overall figures for flooding indicate that four women die for every male death, but that the gender differential is much less in countries where women enjoy more rights. Some studies looking at both women and children have found that they are 14 times more likely than men to die in natural disasters.286

Gender inequities can be evident in a lack of, or inadequate, early warning information targeting women and evacuation procedures and arrangements. Indeed, knowledge of early warnings and the decision to evacuate may be the exclusive domain of men. In some cases, women may be ill-informed about natural hazards and not allowed to make the decision to evacuate. This was the case, for example, in Bangladesh’s Cyclone Gorky in 1991 in which women accounted for 90 percent of the 140,000 fatalities.287 In contrast, the World Bank notes that the lack of deaths in one community affected by Hurricane Mitch in Nicaragua, La Masica, was a result of women’s involvement in preparedness education and other activities, including their monitoring of the early warning system.288

Other differences can also put women at a greater risk of mortality. For example, some women have physiological limitations that prevent them from surviving, such as less strength or endurance compared to men.289 In addition, they may not, compared to men and boys, have been taught to swim, and may face difficulty in fleeing with their children or elderly relatives in tow, and when pregnant.290 The fact that so many more women than men perished during the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami meant that many men had to take on new


287 Female mortality rates compared to male mortality rates were most significant within the 20-49 age group: they were four to five times higher. For further analysis and a related literature review, see: Keiko Ikeda, “Gender differences in human loss and vulnerability in natural disasters: A case study from Bangladesh,” Indian Journal of Gender Studies, September 1995, vol. 2 no. 2, pp. 171-193.


roles within their families, while also trying to continue to earn a living.\textsuperscript{291}

After natural disasters strike, pre-existing vulnerabilities and patterns of discrimination are usually exacerbated and women face protection risks including unequal access to assistance, discrimination in aid provision, loss of documentation, and inequitable access to property restitution.\textsuperscript{292} A lack of security in camps, impunity for perpetrators of violence and a breakdown of social structures that is often prevalent in a crisis also result in protection risks for women. Women may face heightened risk of domestic violence, and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence and exploitation, including trafficking.\textsuperscript{293} For example, following the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami, women in IDP camps in Aceh faced an increased risk of sexual and gender-based violence, including trafficking. Poor IDP camp design, including the placement and design of latrines, increased the protection risks for women and reportedly made women feel unsafe.\textsuperscript{294} There were reports of traffickers coming to IDP camps promising women and girls jobs, proposing marriage, or seeking adoption, and of IDPs’ involvement in trafficking in the camps, such as through the recruitment of girls.\textsuperscript{295} Following Tropical Storm Bopha (Pablo) in the Philippines, there were reports of the presence of “recruiters” in some affected villages promising women work as domestic help in the Middle East, and a reported rise in some instances in the number of women taking up this offer.\textsuperscript{296} In Haiti since the 2010 earthquake, while accurate data is difficult to obtain, women and girls have been particularly vulnerable to sexual and gender-based violence in camps.\textsuperscript{297} A 2010 UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) assessment

\textsuperscript{291} All India Disaster Mitigation Institute, \textit{Tsunami, Gender and Recovery}, Special Issue for International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction, October 12, 2005, iss. 6, p. 3.


\textsuperscript{295} Ibid., pp. 11-12.


conducted after the flooding in Pakistan found that women reported sexual harassment in IDP camps, which were characterized by cramped and unsafe conditions that did not allow them to practice purdah, and by a mix of tribes, families and villages.298 The text box below highlights the range of specific provisions on the protection of women addressed in the 2010 Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Operational Guidelines on the Protection of Persons in Situations of Natural Disasters.

Climate change effects also have gendered impacts on rights and livelihoods, and can result in changes to traditional practices.299 For example, when rural men migrate to cities because their livelihoods are threatened by the effects of climate change, rural women left behind often face increased risks.300 Their domestic workload usually increases, which is also generally the case after a disaster strikes. Climate change impacts can result in water scarcity, which increases the burdens on women, who are responsible for collecting water in many parts of the world.301 As a result of the increased workload that women bear, girls may drop out of school to help their mothers.302 Marriage customs in Dumuria village in Shyamnagar, India, have changed due to the increased salinity of water. Some parents do not want their daughters marrying, as no one will be able to collect water for them,
and marriages are not arranged with people in hard-hit areas.\footnote{Example from ActionAid Bangladesh, cited in Hannah Reid et al., \textit{Up in smoke? Asia and the Pacific: The threat from climate change to human development and the environment}, 2007, p. 23.} Other ricochet effects of climate change include food insecurity and health concerns. Women may turn to “survival sex” to provide for their families.\footnote{See discussion on: “Gender and Climate Change,” in Hannah Reid et al., \textit{Up in smoke? Asia and the Pacific: The threat from climate change to human development and the environment}. The fifth report from the Working Group on Climate Change and Development, 2007, pp. 22-23, http://pubs.iied.org/pdfs/10020IIED.pdf} Children may face an increased risk of health issues and economic and sexual exploitation and abuse.\footnote{See further: Emily Polock, \textit{Child Rights and Climate Change Adaptation: Voices from Kenya and Cambodia, Children in a Changing Climate}, February 2010; Christian Nellemann et al., op. cit.}

In order to prevent, mitigate and address protection concerns, the entire cycle of disaster and climate risk management planning and implementation should incorporate gender- and age-based approaches that take into account the vulnerabilities and capacities of women, men and children. To this effect, we now turn to some examples at the national, local and multilateral levels which show progress made and remaining challenges.

\section*{SECTION 2
Filling the Void: Women as Agents of Disaster Risk Management}


While there are some national, local and other DRR or DM policies that include gender components or are gender-sensitive, most national policies tend to focus on disaster response rather than disaster management.\footnote{UNISDR, op. cit., p. 10.} Some exceptions include India’s National Disaster Management Guidelines (2007) for the development of state disaster management...
plans, which call for both the participation of women in disaster planning and recognition of women as agents in disaster management.\textsuperscript{310} India’s National Policy on Disaster Management (2009) recognizes the vulnerability of women and other groups and mandates the inclusion of women in State Disaster Response Forces, the participation of women and youth in decision-making during community-based disaster preparedness, and charges states with providing for the “permanent” restoration of livelihoods for female-headed households, among other marginalized and vulnerable groups.\textsuperscript{311} Japan’s Basic Guidelines for Reconstruction (2011), adopted in response to the Great East Japan Earthquake, state the aim to promote the participation of “women in all platforms and organizations of reconstruction, from the perspective of a gender equal society.”\textsuperscript{312} As a 2011 study for the HFA Mid-Term Review notes, at the regional level, the Center for the Prevention of Natural Disasters in Central America (CEPREDENCAN), an inter-governmental body, stands out for its efforts to bring together national disaster management and other government authorities with grassroots women’s organizations to jointly review and develop DRR strategies.\textsuperscript{313} The

\begin{center}
\textbf{Pastoralist Boran Women in Ethiopia:}

\textbf{Community Leaders for Drought Resiliency}
\end{center}

Capacity building – including literacy and numeracy skills, and microenterprise training – was provided to pastoralist women’s savings and loan groups in southern Ethiopia from 2000 to 2004 as part of the Pastoral Risk Management (PARIMA) project of the Global Livestock Collaborative Research Support Program. As a result of this initiative in impoverished communities on the Borana Plateau – hard-hit by drought in 1983-1985, 1991-1993, 1998-1999 – women (and communities as a whole) facing the 2005-2008 drought cycle were more resilient to chronic drought, with preserved assets, access to income and improved food security.

Using a community-based approach to tackle the issues their communities identified, poor women emerged as leaders, overcoming domestic burdens. As leaders, they engaged in local collective action, inspired from their participation in cross-border tours between their communities and those of Kenyan women leaders. The emergence of female leaders among the Boran shows that traditional gender roles are not always static: “It was…highly unexpected given that women have been typically relegated to performing menial tasks and having a low social profile in this society. Traditional gender roles are distinct for the Boran.”

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\item Government of India, \textit{National Policy on Disaster Management}, 2009, Sec. 1.2.2; Sec. 3.4.5; Sec. 5.3.2; Sec. 9.5.1, www.preventionweb.net/files/12733_NationalDisasterManagementPolicy2009.pdf
\item Suranjana Gupta and Irene S. Leung, \textit{Turning Good Practices into Institutional Mechanisms: Investing in grassroots women’s leadership to scale up local implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action: An}
\end{footnotes}
UNDPs have noted that while regional bodies such as the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA) and SOPAC Division of Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) have begun to address the gender aspects of climate risk management, “…much work remains to be done in order to consistently incorporate a gender perspective into ongoing disaster preparedness and management in Caribbean and Pacific island communities.” At the multilateral level, efforts by the World Bank include the development by the East Asia and Pacific department of regional guidance on gender-sensitive disaster and climate risk management, in addition to the provision of capacity building to Bank staff and partners, and country-level policy analysis.

In practice, disaster risk management processes across the board largely exclude the work already being done by women. A meeting of leading women experts at the birthplace of the Hyogo Framework for Action called on SRSG Margareta Wahlström to exert pressure for gender equality in disaster risk reduction. Former Governor of Chiba Prefecture in Japan, Akiko Domoto, remarked at the meeting: “A lot of actual work is being done by women, but not integrated into policies and the decision-making process. It’s a challenge for women to be visible. In disaster risk reduction, more social issues need to be advanced, not just infrastructure related issues.”

This gap is evident around the world. According to a 2009 Huairou Commission survey, women’s civil society organizations active in DRR in Latin America, the Caribbean, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East and North Africa region felt excluded from national emergency preparedness and other disaster risk reduction programs. In terms of climate change negotiations, processes and institutions, similar trends in the lack of women’s formal participation, despite significant local-level engagement, are prevalent.

While women’s grassroots disaster and climate risk management efforts often go unrecognized beyond local levels, there are many examples of women playing DRM leadership roles in their communities. Women leaders around the world, including in the
political arena, are serving as agents to reduce the risks associated with natural hazards and with climate change. For instance, Mauritania’s first female mayor, Abdel Malick, was elected in 2001 and has since championed disaster risk reduction. The capital – which includes her municipality of 60,000 inhabitants, Tevragh-Zeina, is experiencing rapid urbanization and is vulnerable to the effects of climate change, including sea level rise. To address these issues, in 2011 she joined the UNISDR “Making Cities Resilient Campaign.” Through this campaign, she has organized several programs and campaigns with community participation, including schools, youth groups and women’s groups, in mitigation and preparedness measures. Gender-sensitive DRR efforts in Mauritania should be understood within the broader political and socioeconomic situation of women in the country. The fact that there were no women’s groups participating in national DRR platforms, as revealed in Mauritania’s 2013 report on its implementation of the HFA, reflects the trend found in the above-mentioned Huairou Commission survey.

There is ample evidence that women are actively involved as agents of DRM – in preparation, response and reconstruction efforts. These roles are in addition to their domestic tasks and, in many cases, paid work. Domestic workloads increase for women after disasters, and disasters affect the type of work men and women are able to secure. In disaster contexts around the world, women have been effective community volunteers for disaster preparedness and mitigation, search-and-rescuers before official responders arrived, sources of community solidarity for coping after a disaster, professional service providers and political organizers for job and housing equity, among other roles and activities. For example, following the Spitak earthquake in Turkey, girls and young women located over 70,000 displaced persons, even though many had lost relatives themselves: “Victim/survivors themselves, they ‘survived psychologically by becoming active in their own rehabilitation.’”

UNISDR points to several examples of women engaging at the community level in DRM. For example, in Cuttack, India, the women’s group Mahila Milan leads disaster risk reduction efforts in informal settlements, through accurate, disaggregated digitalized risk mapping for urban development planning undertaken in partnership with local slum dweller

319 UNISDR, “Mauritania’s trailblazer for women and resilience,” www.unisdr.org/archive/30064
323 Ibid.
324 Ibid.
federations. City authorities use the digital maps, and data is used “to negotiate support for upgrading or relocating houses, thus reducing disaster risk.”

In addition, UNISDR’s 2012 Making Cities Resilient report cites numerous examples of the involvement of vulnerable community groups, including women, in disaster risk management processes at the local level in various cities around the world – including in Santa Tecla, El Salvador; Albay, Makati and Quezon, Philippines; Thimphu, Bhutan; Bhubaneswar, India; and San Francisco, United States.

Disaster and climate risk management policies and programs should not only involve the participation of women in their development, but efforts must also be taken to ensure that women are well-informed about them. A 2009 Huairou Commission survey of grassroots women’s organizations found that, “While governments have reported that they have comprehensive DM programs, women consistently stated that they were not aware of disaster management programs at the national level, nor did they understand what resources or entitlements were available through their government programs.”

As the above analysis shows, in many instances, women already engage effectively in disaster and climate risk management, but there is a huge disconnect between their work and equitable integration into all stages of decision-making processes, policies and programs. As long as women are excluded from effective engagement at such levels, gender inequities will be persistent, and countries will not recover as quickly from both the major and chronic economic shocks that disasters and climate change impacts engender.

Perhaps as part of a broader trend to ‘build back better’ after a disaster occurs, some international agencies have seen the possibility of expanding women’s traditional roles in post-disaster response and recovery. As the Borana example above demonstrates, women may have more access to capacity-building programs and more and different livelihood opportunities in the aftermath of a disaster. In at least a few cases, particularly in high-visibility mega-disasters, women may end up with better housing or more tools than they would have otherwise had. The loss of husbands and fathers may lead to women assuming new roles within family structures and to changing power dynamics between women and men. Rather than counting on their husbands to grow food and build structures, for example, they may come to rely on humanitarian assistance. While their work often...
increases – standing in lines for water or food, searching for fuel, caring for injured relatives – the workload of the traditional head of household may decrease. It is important not to overstate the case that disasters offer ‘silver linings’ for women. But disasters have a way of shaking up traditional structures in ways that may provide, at least in the short term, different possibilities for women.

SECTION 3
Recommendations and Conclusion

We now turn to a few recommendations for relevant stakeholders, to achieve sustainable gains in disaster and climate risk management by incorporating gender-based approaches. These recommendations are mutually reinforcing.

❖ Promote and provide incentives for the meaningful participation of women in disaster and climate risk management, including in leadership roles

Women should be effectively engaged in disaster and climate risk management prevention, planning, decision-making and implementation efforts. As a study commissioned for the 2010-2011 HFA Mid-Term Review recommended, governments’ engagement of women’s civil society organizations should be incentivized as a way to overcome their exclusion from decision-making. Providing adequate and timely support to women’s existing work, and ensuring their meaningful participation at local, national, regional and international levels, is critical to addressing gender inequalities, with benefits for long-term, sustainable risk management and overall development gains. This means that governments and international humanitarian actors must devote time to identifying women’s associations and networks which are active in the community and creating mechanisms for their effective participation. Often, it is simply not effective to invite representatives of women’s groups to come to a meeting – particularly when most of the participants in the meeting are men. Rather, efforts must be taken to enable women to feel comfortable about putting forward their ideas. Finding successful ways of engaging women takes time – more time than identifying traditional community leaders. And time is always difficult to find in the immediate aftermath of a disaster. For this reason, engaging women in longer-term work associated with disaster risk reduction and recovery efforts is more likely to be accepted and successful.

❖ Ensure the implementation of a rights-based approach to disaster preparedness, response and recovery activities, using the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Operational Guidelines on the Protection of


331 Some humanitarian agencies have found it useful, for example, to organize focus groups for women only or to deploy female staff to reach out to women in affected communities.
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Persons in Situations of Natural Disasters (2011) and other existing guidelines on humanitarian standards in situations of natural disasters.332

The Operational Guidelines cover measures for:

1. Protection of life; security and physical integrity of the person; and family ties;
2. Protection of rights related to the provision of food; health; shelter; and education;
3. Protection of rights related to housing; land and property; livelihoods; secondary and higher education; and
4. Protection of rights related to documentation; movement; re-establishment of family ties; expression and opinion; and elections.

These guidelines offer clear guidance to humanitarian actors and provide concrete examples of how to translate them into practice. For example, agencies can consider including women in food distribution teams and setting up separate lines and distribution points where cultural traditions limit women’s mobility in public spaces.

As the Operational Guidelines emphasize, “Often, negative impacts on the human rights concerns after a natural disaster do not arise from purposeful policies but are the result of inadequate planning and disaster preparedness, inappropriate policies and measures to respond to the disasters, or simple neglect.”333 Too often, national government officials and international agencies do not ‘see’ the needs of affected communities through a gender lens. And, yet, in order to ensure that the rights of all individuals affected by a disaster are upheld, a gender-specific approach is necessary.

In spite of almost ten years of work to raise the visibility of human rights in disaster situations and hundreds of pages of guidelines and manuals, the importance of awareness of gender aspects in DRM policies and practice cannot be overestimated. When those working in all phases of disaster risk management are aware of gender realities, they are more likely to develop and implement policies and programs that not only meet the specific needs of women and men, but that also tap into their invaluable capacities.

❖ Collect and maintain gender-disaggregated data

Governments and all organizations involved in disaster and climate risk management efforts must do a better job of collecting and maintaining data disaggregated by sex, age and other key characteristics. This data should inform assessments, strategies, policies, programs and monitoring and evaluation. Without this critical


333 Ibid., p. 2.
data to inform policy and planning, risks may not be adequately or effectively mitigated, thereby wasting precious financial and human resources. According to the 2010-2011 HFA Mid-Term Review, initial data from the 2009-2011 HFA Monitor indicate that 62 out of 70 countries do not collect vulnerability and capacity information disaggregated by gender. Hence, it is clear that collecting such data is a critical starting point for implementing a systematic, gender-sensitive approach to risk management. Governments should insist that their DRM programs collect gender-disaggregated data. Donors should require – and support – those they fund to collect information organized by gender and other relevant categories.

- **Conduct further research on gender and disaster and climate risk management**

While there has been a laudable increase in reporting on gender and natural disasters and climate change, particularly in recent years, there is still a dearth of gender-based analysis in existing risk reporting, assessments and evaluations that are not specifically focused on gender. For example, the IPCC’s 2003 report failed to include gender considerations in its cross-cutting themes, and there is no attention to gender or women in its 2007 Synthesis report. The Urban Risk Assessment, developed by the World Bank, with UN-Habitat, UNEP and Cities Alliance, only mentions women in its suggestions for urban risk mapping which should take into account vulnerable groups, including “women-headed households,” and “gender” as one of the variables which indicate household resiliency, to use in socioeconomic assessments. However, the reporting on the case studies lacked any specific gender analysis. A gender-sensitive approach does not just entail attention paid to or inclusion of women, but also consideration of the needs and capacities of men, which are often overlooked. At the same time, applying a gender analysis only in terms of vulnerabilities often has the effect of de-emphasizing the resources and capacities for leadership which women bring. While it is true that women tend to have specific vulnerabilities, it is also true that not all women are vulnerable. Care must be taken to consider and assess strategies that address the specific needs, vulnerabilities and capacities of men, women, children, and various groups within, as well as how their needs, roles and capacities change over time.

- **Ensure the integration of a gender-sensitive approach to disaster and climate risk management in key policies and programs** – including all five priority areas of the HFA, climate risk management plans and programs (e.g., the World Bank’s

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335 Developed as part of a Memorandum of Understanding on a joint Cities and Climate Change work program between UN-Habitat, UNEP, and the World Bank, and supported by Cities Alliance.


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country-level Strategic Programs for Climate Resilience), development strategies, and poverty eradication strategies. The need to incorporate DRR into development planning and poverty eradication programs is already widely recognized.\textsuperscript{338} There is also greater recognition of the need for a gender-sensitive approach to disaster and climate risk management efforts. This multi-pronged approach to disaster and climate risk reduction will greatly reduce risk for women, men, and children – and by extension, communities and countries as a whole.

Conclusion

As this chapter has recounted, international awareness of the importance of gender in humanitarian and development programs dates back some three decades, and national governments and international organizations have taken important steps to incorporate gender into disaster risk management policies and programs. And yet, in almost every major disaster of the past three decades, there are reports of women facing discrimination or neglect in assistance or recovery planning.\textsuperscript{339}

Ensuring the integration of gender-sensitive approaches requires more than guidelines and statements of intent.\textsuperscript{340} It requires the active engagement of civil society, particularly human rights groups and women’s associations to monitor both the development and implementation of these policies. National human rights commissions, for example, can play a role in identifying areas where women have been excluded from planning processes. Women’s groups can develop mechanisms by which women can come together to identify their common concerns and develop strategies for voice these concerns to those in policy-making positions. International organizations should require reporting by their field staff on the concrete results of women’s participation in relevant programs. For their part, donors should ensure that the organizations they fund integrate a gender perspective into all of their work.

Adopting a gender-sensitive approach to disaster risk management is not only an issue of basic human rights but also effective on the practical level. Simply put, policies that ensure that women as well as men are fully involved in planning DRR strategies and are full participants in recovery efforts are more likely to succeed. Disaster response strategies that protect and assist women as well as men are better for the community as a whole. A gender-sensitive approach is also a smart policy in that it enables the resources of all members of an affected community to be fully utilized.


\textsuperscript{339} See above text for specific examples, e.g. Haiti, Pakistan.

\textsuperscript{340} Even in developed countries, such as the United States, there were reports of dramatic increases in sexual and gender-based violence for those displaced by Hurricane Katrina in 2005; see: Chris Kromm and Sue Striggs, \textit{Hurricane Katrina and the Guiding Principles: A Global Human Rights Perspective on a National Disaster}, Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement and Institute for Southern Studies, January 2008, www.brookings.edu/~/media/events/2008/1/14%20disasters/0114_isskatrina.pdf