



## ISSUE BRIEF

### Mobilizing Women's Leadership in Disaster Risk Reduction

#### High level multi-stakeholder partnership dialogue

#### I. Stock taking

Disaster risk reduction (DRR) is a fundamental pillar of sustainable development and requires an “All of Society Inclusive Approach”. Disasters affect men and women, and boys and girls, differently. A gender perspective to DRR helps focusing attention on the distinct gender-specific capacities and vulnerabilities to prevent, prepare, confront, and recover from disasters. In many contexts gender inequalities constrain the influence and control of women and girls over decisions governing their lives as well as their access to resources such as finance, food, agricultural inputs, land and property, technologies, education, health (including sexual and reproductive health), secure housing and employment. Due to existing socio-economic conditions, cultural beliefs and traditional practices, women are more likely to be disproportionately affected by disasters, including increased loss of livelihoods, gender-based violence, and even loss of life during and in the aftermath of disasters.<sup>1</sup>

Consistent advocacy over the last ten years has resulted in an increasing acknowledgement of the constructive role of women in disaster risk reduction; that women and girls – like men and boys – possess skills and capacity to prepare for, respond to and recover from crisis, and to manage risk and build resilience. The capacity and knowledge of women and girls play an important part in individual as well as community resilience. This is an important departure from traditional views of women and girls as inherently vulnerable and passive recipients of development and humanitarian assistance. However, despite some progress in acknowledging the importance of gender-sensitive DRR, there remains gaps in mainstreaming gender into DRR design, planning, resourcing and implementation. Failure to consider both women's and men's concerns in the design and implementation of DRR programmes would likely lead to overlooking the true costs of disasters and make DRR investments less effective. Protecting human rights, promoting gender equality and women's equal participation and leadership is thus central to disaster risk reduction and resilience building.

DRR's focus on addressing the underlying causes of risks and vulnerabilities is an entry point for recognizing root causes and structural constraints of gender inequality and for targeting those in the promotion of transformative and sustainable change. Unequal power relations between women and men and pervasive gender stereotypes are among those structural constraints. Addressing them will contribute to enhancing women's rights, participation and leadership in prevention and reduction of disaster risk at all levels.

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<sup>1</sup> In many cases, the mortality rates for women in the aftermath of a disaster are much higher than those of men. For example, women represented an estimated 61% of fatalities in Myanmar after Cyclone Nargis in 2008, 70% after the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami in Banda Aceh, and 91% after Cyclone Gorky in Bangladesh in 1991.

Promoting women's equal participation and women's leadership in DRR through gender responsive governance at national and local level is paramount as a goal in itself to comply with human rights, and ensure that women's voices are represented and their needs, interests, ideas are brought to the table. A leading role of women in DRR is a key enabler of community resilience, inclusive, sustainable and relevant solutions to reduce disaster risk for all and thus a prerequisite for the success of the post-2015 framework for disaster risk reduction.

## **II. Overview**

The empowerment of women is a critical ingredient in building disaster resilience. Women are often the designers and builders of community resilience at the local level. There are countless examples where empowering women to exercise leadership within their communities contributes to disaster resilience. There is also strong and mounting evidence at the country level that improving gender equality contributes to policy choices that lead to better environmental governance, whether through increased representation and voice of women within their communities, in society at large, and at the political level, or through increased labor force participation.

At the normative level the international community has committed to a strong focus on gender equality and women's rights in disaster risk reduction. These commitments are grounded in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, as well as other international agreements such as the Hyogo Framework for Action: Building the resilience of nations and communities to disasters 2005-15 (HFA) and CSW resolutions (56/2 and 58/2) on gender equality and the empowerment of women in natural disasters.

A number of countries continuously work to integrate gender dimensions into risk reduction and disaster response involving women and men actively in planning and implementation. Civil society and women's organisations are undertaking innovative, gender equitable, pro-poor work to reduce disaster risk and build resilience of communities. They are developing community based models as well as promoting gender responsive disaster risk governance by enhancing women's skills and capacities to overcome barriers to their equal participation in decision making processes at local and national level.

While progress has been made in the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA), it is widely recognized that serious gaps and challenges remain in delivering on the international community's commitments to gender equality and women's rights in disaster risk reduction efforts. Engagement and leadership of women as change agents in their societies are still often overlooked in disaster risk management, where women are often categorized as a vulnerable group.

Periodic reviews on HFA implementation progress show the status of gender equality and women's social, economic and political empowerment are considered limited and unsatisfactory. Global and regional consultations on the post-2015 framework for disaster risk reduction signaled a clear message that gender equality considerations require a stronger implementation focus and called for strong engagement and promotion of women's leadership in DRR. There is a wealth of recognized policy advice, best practices, strong evidence-based recommendations, innovations, guidance and tools for rights-based, gender sensitive approaches for disaster risk reduction and resilience building. This implies that it is lack of political attention and priority, inadequate capacity for implementation, as well as gaps in monitoring and accountability mechanisms which impede implementation of gender equality commitments.

As structural barriers to women's participation and leadership in decision making is a systemic problem, delivering on commitments to promoting women's leadership in DRR requires dedicated and targeted actions. It requires the facilitation of women's leadership despite these society wide

barriers in addition to expanding and strengthening women's capacities to engage. A crucial element is recognizing and strengthening the role and capabilities of civil society and women's organisations in particular, and empowering them, through policies, access to resources and capacity building, to hold decision makers accountable for transparent, inclusive and gender response DRR management.

Explicitly mentioning gender differentiation and promoting gender parity in all instances in DRR efforts across sectors, e.g. addressing unequal access to and control over resources to ensure resilience. This will lead to more just, relevant, effective and sustainable DRR for women and men as well as contribute to overall development and human rights objectives. Gender sensitive and participatory disaster risk reduction management can also increase and broaden ownership and sustainability of initiatives by ensuring greater relevance through equal involvement of the population as a whole. For example, the disaster recovery phase can present opportunities for new and more progressive gender roles and relationships to emerge, and provide opportunities to rebuild in a way that is inclusive of women and girls and provide opportunities for women to assume leadership roles and better influence the direction of development patterns.

### **III. Way forward**

The post-2015 framework for disaster risk reduction is well placed to highlight the importance of engaging women as key stakeholders. Participation of women is critical to effectively managing disaster risk and implementing gender-sensitive DRR policies, plans and capacity building actions. In support of accelerated implementation of commitments to mobilizing women's leadership in DRR, the following aspects should be taken into consideration:

#### **Institutionalization**

The prioritization of gender equality and women's leadership in all facets of DRR governance, in particular national and local planning, is a key enabler of sustainable disaster risk reduction results for women and men. National legal frameworks, policies and organizational arrangements for disaster risk reduction should be reviewed to include specific provisions for practical and measurable targeted actions for the achievement of gender equality and women's participation and leadership in national implementation strategies such as:

- Ensuring institutionalization of capacity, procedures, performance standards, and resources of national and local Disaster Risk Management Authorities to implement programmes that enhance gender equality and women's empowerment;
- Promoting gender parity in national and local Disaster Risk Management institutions at all levels;
- Ensuring that DRR financing is underpinned by gender responsive budgeting and input based expenditure informed by sex-disaggregated data and gender analysis;
- Establishing gender-responsive accountability and monitoring mechanisms at national and local level enabling the measurement of progress on gender equality and the participation, leadership and empowerment of women in disaster risk reduction with associated baselines, indicators, targets and data collection methodologies in place;
- Ensuring that collection and use of sex and age disaggregated data and gender analysis is systematically intergrated in information management, assessment, planning and monitoring methodologies so that the differential impact of disasters on females and males can be made visible, documented and inform efforts. Without data, problem identification and accountability is superficial and perpetuate responses that are insensitive to gender differences;

- Ensuring accountability between respective national institutions for gender equality issues and disaster risk management to ensure stronger cross fertilisation and clarification of responsibilities.

### **Representation**

Women, as individuals and organized groups, are agents and leaders of collaborative change, innovation, resilience, solidarity and survival strategies in their communities. Their perspective and local knowledge provide important contributions to building resilience. It is also important to engage men and boys as essential partners in promoting the valuable contributions and leadership of women. Women's representation and leadership is a human right which can be better promoted in DRR efforts by:

- Establishing participatory decision making and oversight mechanisms to facilitate the voice and influence of gender equality advocates, civil society and national women's machineries, in shaping public policy, making investment decisions, and monitoring investment and performance of Disaster Risk Management institutions;
- Promoting and creating opportunities for collaboration and partnerships between women's and grassroots organizations, gender equality champions and national and local disaster management institutions in the development, management, implementation and monitoring of national and local DRR efforts;
- Recognizing and strengthening women's organizations and networks for improved capacity and participation in DRR at policy and programme levels with particular focus on building on community resilience efforts led by grassroots organizations;
- Supporting community resilience efforts of grassroots women's organizations. Their knowledge and expertise should be formally recognized and incorporated fully into disaster risk reduction plans at local and national levels.

### **Participation and capacity**

Women must be positioned as active stakeholders and decision makers in DRR efforts and not only as a human and economic resource for DRR. Women leadership is further facilitated when they are systematically included and informed and when their participation is supported. This means removing barriers for women to voice their needs and priorities, to access and use of information, capacity development opportunities, training and prioritization of formal and informal education on disaster risk reduction. . This can be facilitated by:

- Institutionalization of quota systems or gender parity in DRR decision making processes and interventions;
- Enhancing women's equal access to information, including early warning, training, education and capacity building to strengthen their self-reliance and ensure the implementation of gender-responsive public information and communication systems;
- Prioritizing education as a critical entry point to engage girls in DRR and engage boys as allies in addressing barriers that prevent the participation of women and girls in DRR;
- Mediating constraints on women's time, mobility and security impeding their participation in DRR (e.g. by providing support to women's other responsibilities so they are not overburdened but have time and opportunity to participate in activities).For example: safe transportation and child-care support is provided; activities and meetings take place at times that are convenient to women; women are compensated materially for the time and skills they contribute;
- Ensuring women's legal entitlements and practical access to assistance and services in relation to disaster risk management such as basic health services, including sexual and reproductive health, compensations, cash transfers, insurance, social security, credit, employment.

## **Accountability**

The post-2015 framework for disaster risk reduction is expected to establish metrics to measure impact and progress against commitments at global, regional, national and local levels. Gender-sensitive accessible data and information on progress will be key to monitor progress in women empowerment for leadership in DRR. It is important to align monitoring systems for DRR with those of the SDGs with particular attention to gender equality and women empowerment commitments. This could be achieved through:

- Ensuring that targets and indicators on post-2015 framework for disaster risk reduction include gender and age-disaggregated data;
- Improving availability and use of gender-disaggregated data in risk assessments, hazards exposure, vulnerability assessment, design of people-centered early warning systems, preparedness and contingency planning and in post-disasters assessment of impacts;
- Improving linkages in monitoring and reporting mechanisms for international frameworks, agreements and commitments related to gender equality and disaster risk reduction to allow for improved progress tracking and accountability with respect to women engagement in DRR (e.g. reporting on the Convention the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Commission on the Status of Women, Beijing Agenda for Global Action on Gender-Sensitive DRR, climate change agreement, post-2015 development agenda, and the post-2015 framework for disaster risk reduction).