

- **Understanding that as care givers to the injured and sick, women require information, resources, and support**
- **Assessing the impact of all response activities on both women and men**
- **Being attentive to those who experience social exclusion** (widows, female heads of households, disabled women, and those from socially/ethnically/religiously marginalised groups)
- **Ensuring that assistance is available for women without placing them at risk of injury or abuse and showing concern for their security by including women distributors**

Annex 3 presents a set of gender-sensitive, post-disaster reconstruction guidelines for those involved in disaster relief.

Disasters are extremely complex phenomena, as are the social and institutional contexts upon which they have an impact: each approach has to be grounded in locally-specific circumstances based on an understanding of sociocultural contexts and needs. At its best, gender analysis plays a critical role in identifying and understanding vulnerable segments of communities, in channelling resources to those most in need, and in helping to mobilise the capacities of those whose contributions are often overlooked because they are deemed to be 'helpless'. Lessons from the field illustrate that without a gender-sensitive lens a great deal of important information about disasters is likely to be overlooked to the great detriment of people and their recovery.

See Annex 4 for issues to be considered in developing gender-sensitive outreach, and Annex 5 for self-assessment tools for disaster-responding agencies.

The road ahead

Taking gender seriously requires a paradigm shift in organisations.
Gender is a pervasive life or death issue.

- Reynold Levy, *International Rescue Committee* (Morris 2003)

Summary

Natural hazards are commonplace throughout the South Asian region. Every year millions of people are exposed to the consequences of earthquakes, cyclones, floods, droughts, and landslides; lives are lost and livelihoods are disrupted; and the financial costs of repairing devastated infrastructure and recouping lost productivity are enormous setbacks to development efforts. Acknowledging the tremendous physical and social costs of such events, the new paradigm of disaster management recognises that effective hazard prevention, preparation, and mitigation should address the needs of vulnerable segments of society, of whom women constitute a large proportion, as well as recognising that local-level initiatives must be included in DP/M work.

The vulnerabilities and capacities of individuals that are shaped by gender take on particular importance in the South Asian context where, across diverse cultural and socioeconomic circumstances, women tend to be socially, economically, and politically marginalised vis à vis men. This marginalisation increases in mountain areas which have greater exposure than many other areas to natural disasters. The fact that mountain people in general are socially and physically marginalised results in mountain women being doubly marginalised by virtue of the mountain aspect as well as the gender aspect. This marginalisation is mirrored in the make-up of disaster prevention, relief, and rehabilitation bodies which rarely include women; and one consequence of this is that their needs and priorities often remain invisible. As this report has outlined, women's vulnerabilities in disasters stem from multiple sources: their care-giving roles to the very young, elderly, and ill which often prevent them from looking after themselves; heavy work burdens; limited control over household resources such as food and income; and the threat of domestic violence and sexual exploitation (Shwoebel and Menon 2004). In addition, the tendency for the DP/M community to view women as victims has contributed to an over-emphasis of their vulnerabilities while failing to highlight the capacities, knowledge, and insights that they, along with men, bring to more effective hazard prevention and sustainable long-term development.

Challenges to and opportunities for gender mainstreaming

One of the main challenges to gender mainstreaming is that, notwithstanding a wealth of field-based knowledge illustrating how and why gender vulnerabilities can have life and death consequences and a large body of gender guidelines prepared specifically for disaster planning and relief work, these remain largely peripheral to DP/M practice.

Why is this and what can be done to address it? At one level the continued marginality of gender – indeed social concerns more generally – is a reflection of the extent to which disaster preparedness and management remains technically weighted in outlook and generally regarded as 'a man's job' (Schwoebel and Menon 2004). To this extent, the failure to 'walk the talk' – in other words, to translate the rhetoric of gender mainstreaming at all levels by bringing on board gender-sensitive personnel; the inclusion of men at all levels who understand and support the need for gender analysis; and



incorporating gender-appropriate methodologies into practice in the field – is an inevitable by-product of thinking that sees gender analysis as a ‘soft’ concern best left to gender specialists who, more often than not, are women.

How do we move forward? Key strategic areas for mainstreaming gender in disaster management are noted below (Schwoebel and Menon 2004).

- (i) *Gender mainstreaming disaster management structures, institutions, and policies* – Women remain inadequately represented at virtually all levels of disaster management decision-making and in various technical fields. This has to be addressed through active recruitment of women into DP/M initiatives; the formation of gender focal points in disaster management institutions; and, given that the tools, knowledge, and means already exist, the garnering of political will to ensure that gender analysis becomes institutionalised and not merely an ‘add-on.’
- (ii) *Information management* – To date much of the knowledge and experience about gender in disasters has emerged from response and recovery work at the community level. In addition, case studies demonstrating effective local-level involvement in mitigation and preparedness, best practices, and lessons learned tend not to be systematically documented and shared. Toward this end, and because so much small-scale and innovative work is being carried out at the local level, it is vital that there be more interaction between government bodies, donor agencies, non-government organisations, and research institutes.
- (iii) *Developing gender awareness and capacity-building* – There remains an urgent need for gender training and capacity building at all levels of the DP/M process, drawing on a consultative process that brings together different groups of practitioners to develop sectoral and culturally-appropriate tool-kits and other training materials.

Final words

This report has reiterated the reasons why disaster vulnerability, impact, and recovery are profoundly gendered issues. At a time when national governments and the international development community are becoming sensitised to the need for developing socially and gender-sensitive disaster preparation methodologies, it is essential that everyone involved in DP/M, whether at their desks or in the field, develop a working familiarity with gender as both a conceptual issue and a living reality; how it shapes the lives of women and men, girls and boys, the elderly, and the young; and, above all, how addressing gender inequalities can play a vital role in reducing subsequent vulnerabilities. It is also vital that practitioners at all levels commit themselves to engagement in cross-disciplinary and sectoral dialogues in order to learn from the lessons emerging from disaster situations around the world and the innovative work that is being developed to respond to them.

The reassuring news is that there is already a large and valuable body of resources available in the form of conceptual and empirical studies, guidelines, and, above all, individuals, non-government organisations, and research institutions working to arrive

at an improved understanding of disasters and their social and gendered impacts. These resources need to be used.

The following are further essential steps.

1. **Continuing the dialogue on gender and disaster** – This needs to be done consistently across all levels, bringing together all parties involved (with an emphasis on civil society institutions) and emphasising participatory and consultative processes in which a wide spectrum of voices and experiences are heard. Attention needs to be given to the reasons why local participation (especially of women and other marginalised groups) may be limited and how this can be addressed.
2. **Sex-disaggregated data** – Collecting sex-disaggregated data before, during, and after disasters, subjecting them to gender analysis, and sharing the findings with practitioners.
3. **Adapt existing methodological tools** to suit region- and locale-specific contexts. Excellent materials are already available and adapting them to meet individual cases is more cost-effective than creating new ones.
4. **Create gender and disaster policies and guidelines** – Data collection, analysis, and strengthening of awareness about the ways in which disasters have gendered outcomes may require the formulation of strong, comprehensive guidelines.
5. **Additional interdisciplinary and inter-sectoral research** – More research and analytical work are required to improve our understanding of the gendered dimensions of impact, loss, and recovery; and to give special attention to the constraints and opportunities shaped by the wider cultural context of disasters.
6. **Developing pilot projects** – Developing gender-sensitive disaster preparedness projects into longer-term sustainable development projects in order to reinforce the disaster-development linkages.
7. **Capacity-building and training support on gender and disasters** – This needs to be acknowledged as an essential component of all DP/M work at all stages, and be required of all personnel, irrespective of their sectoral focus, in order to develop an understanding of gendered roles, responsibilities, vulnerabilities, priorities, and opportunities before, during, and after disaster.

