



Disaster Management & Women : Perspectives and Practices

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The recent Fani cyclone, which hit the districts of Puri, Khurdha, Cuttack and some more districts in the state, has again put the discourse on disaster management in the centre stage. Odisha has won international accolades for the preparedness activities such as early warning, evacuation. But the disaster management cycle is not only about preparedness but also includes restoration and rehabilitation. The centrality of women in disaster management is obvious as the preamble of National Policy for Disaster Management (NPDM) 2009 notes that the economically weaker and socially marginalized sections, women, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and minorities tend to suffer more during disasters. According to the Disaster Management Act of 2005 disaster plans should ensure efficient response and relief with a caring approach towards the needs of the vulnerable sections of the society.

Social Inclusion on Gender is an integral part as per the National Policy for Disaster Management 2018 (draft)¹. According to it, the responsibilities of the Centre are guidance and support for gender sensitive Disaster Risk

Management (DRM) approaches; conduct studies and research; encourage gender-sensitive products/ campaigns from insurance providers; inclusion of gender concerns of Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) in curriculum development; guidance on preventing, checking and investigating discriminatory practices, violence and abuse; provide inter-agency support to prevent and stop trafficking; support from central institutions for gender-sensitive psycho-social support, post-disaster rehabilitation. The responsibilities of the States are to ensure that special efforts are made to make DRM gender inclusive and to ensure participation of women; ensure that there are no discriminatory practices that marginalise sexual and gender minorities at any stage of DRM, use of information and data management to support gender sensitive approaches; convergence of concerned departments to ensure gender sensitive DRR; review and changes in existing regulations, norms and directives to make them gender sensitive; vocational training/ skill development; empowering, especially leadership in DRR; curriculum development with gender sensitive approach; gender audit of DRM measures with the assistance of the State Women's Commission;



ensure joint ownership in the name of husband and wife of houses reconstructed and assets provided under post-disaster recovery assistance.

Such as holistic inclusion of gender concerns are paramount as there is a differential impact of disasters on men and women. **Differential impact and Vulnerabilities of women.** Differential impact of disasters on men and women is caused by the existing gender inequalities. As a 2007 study conducted by London School of Economic shows, taken a sample of up to 141 countries over the period 1981 to 2002, natural disasters and their subsequent impact, on average, kill more women than men or kill women at an earlier age than men related to women's lower socio-economic status (Neumayer and Plümper, 2007). The death toll of women is four times higher than men from the Indian Ocean Tsunami in 2004; flood and cyclone in Gorky in 1991 in Bangladesh, the ratio of women deaths to men was 14:1; Nepal earthquake in 2015 reported 55% of women and girls deaths when compared to men and boys (Hemachandra et al, 2017). Disasters lower women's life expectancy more than men's, according to data from 141 countries affected by disaster between 1981 and 2002. Women, boys and girls are 14 times more likely than men to die during a disaster. Following a disaster, it is more likely that women will be victims of domestic and sexual violence; many even avoid using shelters for fear of being sexually assaulted². Several studies analyzing the impact of disasters have revealed that women and children have greater risks to their survival and recovery in the aftermath of natural disasters.

In general, women tend to have more limited access to assets — physical, financial,

human, social, and natural capital such as land, credit, decision-making bodies, agricultural inputs, technology, extension and training services which aggravate their vulnerabilities to disaster. Women live in poverty and in disadvantaged conditions and are expected to be disproportionately affected with climate induced disasters. Women have maximum burden when it comes to managing households but limited access to education, employment, health care etc. They also have limited say on decision made on adaptation strategy both within family as well as at the policy level which limits the adaptation capacities of women as compared to men.

Role of women in Disaster Risk Reduction and Disaster Risk Governance

In reality, while women's vulnerability to disasters is acknowledged, their actual and potential roles in disaster risk reduction have been overlooked. Few existing disaster risk reduction policies and projects recognize the skills and capacities of women which could significantly contribute to disaster risk reduction policies and building resilience. For many years disaster risk reduction has been treated as gender-neutral, with disasters seen as physical events requiring only physical prevention and recovery. Disaster risk reduction is the concept and practice of reducing disaster risks through systematic efforts to analyse and reduce the causal factors of disasters. Reducing exposure to hazards, lessening vulnerability of people and property, wise management of land and the environment, and improving preparedness and early warning for adverse events are all examples of disaster risk reduction³. Social inclusion is a very robust approach to reduce risks.



Gender-specific capacities of women deriving from their social roles can prove to be beneficial for their whole communities during every stage of the disaster cycle. Women's high level of risk awareness, social networking practices, extensive knowledge of their communities, task in managing natural environmental resources and caring abilities makes of them important players of effective risk assessment, early warning, disaster response and recovery actions.

Sendai Framework and gender

The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 which was adopted at the Third UN World Conference in Sendai, Japan, on March 18, 2015, has provided with people-centered preventive approach to disaster risk. The Sendai Framework, is the successor instrument to the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) 2005-2015, has seven targets and four priorities for action. The priorities for action are : 1. Understanding disaster risk; 2. Strengthening disaster risk governance to manage disaster risk; 3. Investing in disaster risk reduction for resilience and 4. Enhancing disaster preparedness for effective response and to "Build Back Better" in recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction. The Sendai Framework emphasizes the need not only to address the issues related to women in post-disaster reconstruction but also envisages a lead role for women in post-disaster reconstruction: Women and persons with disabilities should publicly lead and promote gender-equitable and universally accessible approaches during the response and reconstruction phases (UNISDR 2015) Priority 4 of the Sendai Framework is on enhancing disaster preparedness for effective response and to "Build Back Better" in recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction. Empowering women and persons with disabilities to publicly

lead and promote gender equitable and universally accessible response, recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction approaches is key. Disasters have demonstrated that the recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction phase, which needs to be prepared ahead of a disaster, is a critical opportunity to "Build Back Better", including through integrating disaster risk reduction into development measures, making nations and communities resilient to disasters. At national and local level, it is important to develop systems through a participatory process; tailor them to the needs of users, including social and cultural requirements, in particular gender.

One of the guiding principles of the framework is the gender perspective of policies as disaster risk reduction requires an all-of-society engagement and partnership. It also requires empowerment and inclusive, accessible and non discriminatory participation, paying special attention to people disproportionately affected by disasters, especially the poorest. A gender, age, disability and cultural perspective should be integrated in all policies and practices, and women and youth leadership should be promoted. In this context, special attention should be paid to the improvement of organized voluntary work of citizens. The role of women as stakeholders has been articulated that 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 to build their capacity to secure alternate means of livelihood in post-disaster situations; Role of women in design of disaster risk policy



has been institutionalized and the Sendai Framework stipulates that Governments should engage with relevant stakeholders, including women, children and youth, persons with disabilities, poor people, migrants, indigenous peoples, volunteers, the community of practitioners and older persons in the design and implementation of policies, plans and standards.

In recent times Disaster Risk Governance (DRG) has received attention due to its ability of enhancing effectiveness of DRR and resilience efforts through participatory decision making. Priority 2 of the Sendai Framework is on strengthening disaster risk governance to manage disaster risk. DRG ensures equal participation in decision making along with equity and equality, and women must be represented in all types as well as all stages of DRR decision making. Gender equality is one of the key components of DRG (UNDP, 2017).

Barriers for women in participating in DRR & DRG

Ten factors have been identified as the limiting factors of role of women in DRG and DRR decision making (Hemachandra et.al, 2017). Those are classified into four categories: a. socio-cultural which include factors such as patriarchal culture, religious beliefs, household size and household workload; b. socio-economic which include factors such as household income; c. individual characteristics with factors such as level of education and self interest and finally d. legal and institutional which include factors such as political environment, policies and legislations and organizational cultures. These barriers have to be overcome for effective participation of women in DRR and DRG.

Good practices : Odisha scenario

Odisha being a coastal state and because of its geographical location, is prone to floods, cyclones and droughts. According to the Odisha State Disaster Management Authority (OSDMA), 95 out of the last 105 years, the state has been affected by disasters brought on by heat waves, cyclones, droughts, and floods. Since 1965, these calamities have become more frequent and widespread. Such disasters have affected millions of people in the state.

In disaster management, recognizing women's crucial role in disaster risk management, the government has systematically invested in building their capacities for a resilient state. Under Community Based Disaster Preparedness Programme, training and capacity building activities are being organized where women are trained on early warning, psychosocial support, first aid, search and rescue and to manage cyclone shelters. Women are now taking a lead role in disaster management teams and committees such as Cyclone/ Flood Shelter Maintenance & Management Committees. The women frontline workers such as ANMs, Anganwadi Workers, ASHAs and women SHG members are the statutory members of these committees. Further, the disaster management plans of district, block, Gram Panchayat and village have institutionalized women's participation. The Multi-Purpose Shelter Buildings have been designed to cater to the needs of girls and women with separate halls and sanitation facilities besides ensuring their safety and privacy. Prioritizing the vulnerable, high priority is assigned to the needs of girls and women, particularly pregnant women and the "minimum initial service package for reproductive health" during disaster is ensured. Special care is taken for evacuation and care of pregnant women,



children, elderly and persons with disabilities during disasters⁴. This has been done successfully during the cyclones Phailin in 2013, Hudhud, Titli 2018 and Fani 2019. Post Fani for the Women Self Help Groups (WSHG), the package announced by government includes Rs 10000 as additional seed money to the affected groups who had pursued livelihood activities. Community Investment Fund of Rs one lakh per SHG will be provided to 15000 groups to facilitate loans for needy households in the extremely affected districts⁵. This will go a long way in facilitating the recovery and rehabilitation of the women affected.

The 2010 Climate Change Action Plan, one of the first plans in the country, is another step taken by the state, which identified the specific vulnerabilities faced by women due to climate change. The plan notes that with increase in scarcity of water and the reducing yield of biomass, the women are disproportionately affected. The plan emphasizes the role of Women Self Help Groups to augment social capital and make the community more resilient. The 2018-2023 Climate Change Action Plan has gone a step further and now has a chapter on Gender. The plan integrates gender concerns by building capacities of women to cope with the climate change. The key priorities identified for integrating gender concerns are agriculture, coast and disaster management, energy, fishery, forestry, health, transport, and water sector⁶.

These initiatives are indicative of not only of the provisions for providing a platform to

women to display their leadership but mainstream their issues in preparedness and recovery both in disaster management as well as in climate change through appropriate policies at one level as well intervening for individual women's capacity building at another level.

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