

**THEMATIC SESSION D4  
GENDER & OTHER SOCIAL ISSUES**

**Chairperson: Ms. Prema Gopalan**  
President, Swayam Shikshan Prayog, Mumbai

**ABSTRACTS**

**SUSTAINABLE RELIEF AND RECONSTRUCTION AND  
INVOLVEMENT OF GRASSROOTS WOMEN AND  
GOVERNANCE**

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Disaster interventions many a time tends to further exacerbate dependency and gender inequities. Essential to implementing a gender-equitable strategy is the recognition that communities and women are primary stakeholders in the recovery and reconstruction process. The paper intends to focus on gains resulting from mainstreaming women's priorities in disaster reduction and development planning.

There are many challenges in mainstreaming gender concerns. Relief, recovery and reconstruction are currently viewed as disparate stages and the multiple actors enter and exit at various stages of disaster response. Critical to addressing women's issues, is widespread and visible participation of women at the grassroots and to provide a platform for fostering participatory democracy and protecting development gains.

More often than not, outside agencies – government ,donors etc do not have the patience and processes to involve communities in planning interventions. This is at the cost of sustainability and increased risk.

Involving civil society, in particular women's groups creates ripples – infrastructure is maintained, small businesses grow, local funds are mobilized and critical services are reorganized. It is well recorded that wherever supported, current large-scale beneficiary driven disaster response can be reshaped into development transformation through active participation.

This paper will be written from a practitioners lens from the experience of working with communities affected by three mass scale disasters in India in the last decade [Latur earthquake (1993), Gujarat earthquake (2001) and South Asian Tsunami (2004)].

The paper will outline elements core to the scaling up of practice through the diffusion of innovations at the grassroots by using peer-to-peer learning, mass media and other methods, which strengthen community response. Capacity development strengthens preparedness and helps to address women's self-help groups to safeguard and strengthen social networks in the face of future disasters.

Practice from the field challenges conventional thinking on mainstreaming gender issues in sustainable reconstruction and provides lessons for World Bank and donor agencies in the context of disaster management, poverty reduction and decentralized governance.

**DISASTER RELIEF SERVICES IN INDIA: EQUITABILITY,  
SENSITIVITY AND EFFECTIVENESS ACROSS GENDER**

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Relief is considered to be an important phase in disaster management cycle which aims at meeting the immediate survival needs of the affected community on a temporary basis. The paper analyses the different forms of physical, mental and economic aid provided to the affected community through a gender perspective and the measures that can be undertaken to make it more sensitive and effective for the affected women.

Whenever a disaster strikes, generally temporary shelters are put into place and several survivors are forced to live together in relief camps. However, in the process, the needs of pregnant, lactating and menstruating women are not adequately considered. The issues of sanitation, specific clothing and toiletries are not generally seen as vital supplies to be provided to women survivors. From an economic perspective, most of the women in India work in an unorganized sector and hence their economic losses are not accounted for in the structured damage assessment mechanisms.

Women in India, are usually entrusted with care giving responsibilities and have “to do more with less” in a disaster scenario, and hence they bear immense stress during that phase. The volunteers who provide psychosocial counseling to the affected community do not generally have adequate representation of women, as a result of which, there may be a general lack of understanding and sensitivity towards women related issues. Moreover, many women may become victims of violence as men try to cope up with frustrations and feelings of loss of power and

livelihood. The affected women may feel more comfortable talking and sharing their feelings and grief with other women counterparts.

The paper while looking into the specific needs of women, argues that relief mechanisms, as are currently practiced, need to be reconceptualised to ensure its effectiveness across gender. It seeks to analyze different aspects of relief by taking case studies and specific measures are suggested thereof to be incorporated into micro level planning

## **INCLUSION OF DISABILITY AND GENDER IN DISASTER MANAGEMENT AND RESPONSE**

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This paper will focus on the issues of gender and within it the marginalized group of women, especially the disabled group. It will take into account the recent disasters in the last few years with a special focus on the 1999 cyclone in Orissa.

In recent years provisions for disabled people are not visible in policies and programmes for natural and man made disasters. The exclusion and systemic undervaluing of the group perpetuates a cycle of poverty and isolation. We believe that disasters lead to further discrimination for already disabled people especially women, creating worse conditions of their health and overall well-being. Challenges and policy requirements based on empirical work carried out by the presenter will be at the core of this paper.

The paper will draw attention to the application of International standards and mechanisms for active collaboration between various key stakeholders to consider the disability issue amongst women while planning for various interventions during disasters. This will go a long way to ensure the health, safety and human rights of disabled women and other marginalized groups.

## **OVERCOMING TRAUMA: WOMEN REBUILD LIVES AND COMMUNITIES**

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A disaster as defined by United Nations is “a serious disruption of the functioning of a society, causing widespread human, material or environmental losses, which exceed the ability of the affected society to cope using its own resources.” A natural disaster disrupts the normal life, the intensity of which is measured in terms of human, domestic animals, materials and environmental losses. The impact of the disaster is more felt by the women being the weaker section of the society.

Tropical climate, unstable landforms, rapid industrialization coupled with high population density poverty, illiteracy and lack of infrastructure, Orissa is one of the vulnerable state of India to suffer from various natural disasters like drought, flood, earthquake, industrial accidents and hazards and forest fire etc.

The full force of the socio-economic-psycho emotional reactions left with the women folk following the disaster has far reaching implications. In this situation often exhaustion, grief, desperation and depression set in, women are the worst sufferers. This situation is the outcome of adjunct status of the women in the society.

After the immediate shock and disbelief of what has happened has passed, emotional breakdown will begin to surface. These responses affecting the women appear to be in the form of over reactions to

irritation, rapid change of moods. Widow and girl child especially orphans are easy prey to sexual harassment and exploitation.

BISWA being an integrated social welfare agency voluntarily includes a wide range of activities, charity, Relief, Services, Welfare, rehabilitation; development of socio-economic environment around human beings, development of human beings has a concern for the women. In a way it has a mission in remedying the less satisfactory conditions that make women the deprived section of society.

## **REBUILDING OPPORTUNITIES AND PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY: STRENGTHENING SOCIAL CAPITAL**

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When the tsunami struck the villages of coastal India, training local women on Information Technology would not have featured in anyone's mind as the relief efforts continued to provide essentials to millions who lost their beloved, their homes and their livelihoods.

As relief efforts moved into the rehabilitation and development phase, Svaraj (formerly Oxfam India Society) worked with the local community and began constructing Village Information Centers. Recognizing the power of information, the objectives of the centers are to provide a self help desk, women and child space, help the community retrieve essential lost documents, deal with the psycho-social issues and train women on new technology.

Accepting that disasters affect women and men differently and recognising that women are not only key actors for change but are an important resource in delivering assistance and rebuilding societies; our key focus is to strengthen the community in the aftermath of the disaster through knowledge and information gathering and sharing, which includes:

- Information Management and Communication - using grassroots process to build information, mobilize skills and capacities to build a social force, which can be channelled to enhance efforts in rehabilitation process.
- Education and Training - putting ICT in the hands of women by providing training to young women on ICT so that they may access information from the Internet and share it with women and other

community members in their own village as well as other villages. This will ensure that these women will benefit from new employment opportunities to build a better life for themselves, their families and their communities.

- Public awareness on the wider economic, social and environmental issues affecting local livelihoods.

## **WOMEN-LED SUSTAINABLE RECOVERY AND RECONSTRUCTION**

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Women's self organizing strategies serve to strengthen and rebuild social networks that are destroyed by natural disasters. In times of crisis these networks are critical to the survival of communities: they are the source of food security, social support, crisis credit, livelihoods support, childcare, and eldercare. These networks in the form of local neighborhood groups, self help groups, etc. become the basis for dialogue, negotiation and partnership between civil society groups and government, local authorities. Much of the organizing and sustaining of these social networks to participate in both disaster recovery and development is undertaken by women. Yet these contributions remain unrecognized, un-resourced in policies and programmes that address disaster reduction. At best, the acknowledgements of women's contributions to sustainable recovery are embedded in the term 'community participation' or couched in general references to gender.

This paper will draw on examples from efforts of grassroots organizations to rebuild their communities after disasters and identify some of the key policy lessons arising from these experiences.

Some of the key lessons that inform the programming and planning for empowering women to participate in the recovery to development process are as follows:

- i. Support grassroots women’s organizations to participate in relief, recovery and planning that is aligned with their community development priorities.
- ii. Enable women to create and manage their own centers or safe spaces in their settlements: These spaces are physical and social spaces which enable women to organize themselves, address psycho-social recovery needs, can use to hold meetings, provide community services and strengthen social networks.
- iii. Put information in the hands of women’s groups: Accurate information is a critical need for participation in planning and decision making in both development and disaster management. Enabling women to gather, analyze and disseminate information on community priorities – related to livelihoods, basic services and shelter - is a powerful way to support their learning and participation in public decision- making.
- iv. Resource peer learning exchanges that support experienced women leaders of CBOs to transfer their good practices to other disaster affected communities. Such exchanges serve to strengthen and scale up good practices while ensuring that capacities and knowledge stay inside local communities rather than leaving with outsiders who are likely to leave.

## **GENDER INTERVENTION IN DISASTER MANAGEMENT**

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In societies where gender variance is prevalent, disasters provide yet another occasion for discrimination; but gender dimensions are often neglected during disaster management operations.

Gender issues could be conceptualized in terms of practical gender needs and strategic gender interests which need to be considered during the relief and rehabilitation phases respectively. Practical needs and strategic interests can be accomplished only if gender constraints and deprivations are overcome. This approach needs to be impregnated in the policy, and implemented through various relief and rehabilitation measures. The process of gender discrimination during disaster management could then alone be arrested and the severity of disasters reduced.

Drawing from the experiences in India, the paper presents principles, which could be universally applicable. The paper also advocates policy and practice measures which need to be taken after any disaster so that gender discrimination is avoided and gender equality attained. Policy measures relate to the issues of compensation, inheritance, property rights and control over assets whereas practice measures relate to providing gender sensitive relief and rehabilitation measures, livelihood options and administration of humanitarian response.

**WOMEN AS DISASTER MANAGERS: A GENDER SENSITIVE  
APPROACH TO RISK REDUCTION OF COMMUNITIES IN  
UTTARKASHI DISTRICT OF UTTARANCHAL**

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This paper seeks to argue that including women as disaster managers in the process of preparing community based disaster management plans can substantially reduce the risk that the communities in the hill districts are faced with in Uttaranchal. The Varunavat landslide in Uttarkashi district 2003, which started on 23<sup>rd</sup> September, 2003 and lasted for about one and a half months, would be used as a case in point to raise and underline the key issues related to inclusion of women in disaster management processes.

Women constitute the major work force in the hill districts of Uttaranchal, as a large number of able bodied men migrate out in search of jobs to the plains. As a result, women are the primary work force both as unpaid agricultural labourers and as household workers. Their work hours usually range from 15-18 hours on an average. They collect fodder and fuel wood and carry water from long distances, besides the routine household work of cooking, cleaning, washing clothes, tending the cattle, and taking care of children, old and the sick.

Notwithstanding their long work hours, during natural disasters women also end up being the key disaster managers at the community level, which is often not taken into account in planning disaster management activities such as preparation of disaster management plans, vulnerability and risk assessment, search, rescue, relief, shelter management, and provision of basic services such as water and sanitation.

The paper tries to develop a conceptual and methodological framework for inclusion of women in disaster management processes as disaster managers and agents of change and underlines the specific ways in which this could be done. It also points out the broader policy implications of this shift in perspective, which looks at women as disaster managers in the context of mountain states of India.

## **WOMEN AS DISASTER PREPAREDNESS MANAGERS**

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Over the past few years, the community across the globe has faced disasters in one form or the other. The communication networks have played a major role in gaining sympathy/empathy of the world, thus leading to effective rescue, relief and rehabilitation. The concept of rescue, relief and rehabilitation places disaster in an isolated context neglecting the gamut of complexities associated with it. A change in approach gives a picture that natural disasters strike irrespective of any societal complexities but the consequences impinge on the society with its varied complexities and degrees due to already existing inequalities. It is at this point, the deep rooted 'gender' inequality within the communities that gets focused.

The existing inequalities aggravate the consequences faced by women. The productive as well as the reproductive roles place immense stress on women. To add to it, the relief and rehabilitation measures do not reach women adequately due to their existing traditional roles.

This highlights the need for clarity on understanding the gender based inequalities within a society and understanding that women are active partners and not victims in a disaster scenario. With this understanding, women are placed within the paradigm shift for disaster mitigation to disaster management. More so the women have to be identified as critical players due to their understanding of local and family needs.

This conceptualization emphasizes on the shift from response to the concept of preparedness. The change in perspective will put the system in

place to address preparedness, where women as resource users and managers will constitute immensely towards the intended goal. This readiness to address a disaster by the community, especially women, will go a long way in the effective management of a disaster.

This paper attempts to capture the different framework of preparedness in addressing disasters and focusing on women's contribution in the given framework.

## **REDUCTION OF VULNERABILITY OF INDIAN WOMEN: A KEY MITIGATION PROCESS**

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The status of women of a nation acts like a mirror that reflects the condition of a nation. The persistence of hunger and acute poverty in India and other parts of the developing world is due to subjugation, marginalization and disempowerment of women. The Indian women suffer in the area of nutrition; poor health; education; overwork; mistreatment and lack of say. So it is very clear that a large section of the women of India are vulnerable. Thus as far as the impact of natural disaster is concerned, Indian women are far more likely to die than men. This is because women lack knowledge of disaster, due to lack of education. This increases the risk of violence after the disaster. To make the matter worse, women do not receive necessary health care during/ after the disaster and may be denied adequate relief aid or compensation for their losses. Also, women experience ongoing economic vulnerability more than men during and after disaster and are mostly excluded from a say in rebuilding and reconstruction efforts.

To improve this situation, pre-disaster activities from hazard mapping to vulnerability analysis may be made. To ensure the success of relief and/or disaster preparation efforts, the agencies must consult the affected community, especially women. Health assessments should provide sex-disaggregated data and include gender analysis. Women's needs to be taken care of in a gender sensitive manner; their physical safety should be ensured. Affected women should be given long-term income projects/jobs. Housing and land rights in the country must be secured for displaced

women; chronically ill and frail elderly women should be identified as special risk population; gender training of people related to disaster management should become an integral part of staff training. Finally, identifying the problems and thereby reducing the vulnerability of women can become a key mitigation measure reducing potential losses from future disasters.

areas.

## **TOWARDS DISASTER RESILIENCE**

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The link between disasters and development is increasingly becoming clear. This is primarily due to the demystification of disasters as nature's wrath. The understanding of natural disasters as a result of natural hazard acting upon the vulnerabilities in which individuals /communities exist in, has led it to be clearly related to underdevelopment.

As a rule the most vulnerable people are the economically poor and in the event of a disaster, among other things their livelihoods gets disrupted and women are one of the most affected, not just economically but also physically and socially.

While disasters don't discriminate, social structures do and though seen as the most vulnerable group, women play a major, albeit invisible role for societies to come back to normalcy, post disaster. This invisibility is largely due to the fact that women are still not together and as individuals their work, labour and existence is interpreted in the language of pre-disaster social structures.

As the focus changes from disaster management to disaster preparedness, risk coping strategies are increasingly focusing on livelihood generation activities. The premise of this paper is that women should be central to these activities and their common strength (as Self Help Groups), the formation of which is largely a post disaster event, should be encouraged (as a strategy) as a pre disaster risk sharing structure based on solidarity.

This structure should have a pre disaster and post disaster life with activities designed by women that link and complements the pre and post disaster scenario.

While micro credit availability has been successful outcome of the SHGs, there is a need for risk pooling for disasters to instill a resilience capacity in women than dependence on aid.

## **WOMEN’S ROLE IN LONG TERM SUSTAINABILITY**

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In India, gender equity is often ignored in many fields, due to the soft nature and lack of education amongst the women. Today, due to the advancement in the field of science, technology and medicine, gender equity is gaining momentum and importance. However, even today, we can observe gender inequity in rural areas due to lack of basic education, health and the dominance of the local panchayat in some states.

Although, we are aware of what has to be done for the welfare and, upliftment of the weaker society, we are often narrow minded in achieving specific goals, since there is no political will. To fulfill the vision of our president to make our country as a developed country by 2020, equal importance should be given for the development of the rural youth and the women in all aspects.

Disasters are not new, but management of disasters such as tsunami is new concept for every one. In India the rural women are not aware of the basic needs and ways to combat disasters. Motivation and awareness are the key words and it should be from the heart of the motivator, in order to reach in the minds of the community and not as a mere lip service.

It is imperative now to analyze the situation as a need based approach not as the existing scheme based approach. Attaining long term sustainability can be done by empowering the Self help groups (SHG’s) in the country. These SHG’s with the assistance and guidance of the NGO’s can be

trained for successful reconstruction and livelihood programmes for the welfare of the poorest of the poor.

## **IMPACT OF DISASTERS ON SOCIAL ISSUES IN MIGRATION IN NORTH BIHAR**

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The flood prone areas of North Bihar have the notoriety of having largest number of migrations to the other parts of the country. In recent years besides economic, social, religious and political causes, disasters have also acted as a major stimulant in "push and pull" factor of population. Keeping this in view, disasters like flood, fire, cyclone etc have played a major role in the pushing the masses to the areas in search of easy and better lives.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the migration trends and patterns in the north Bihar in pre, during and post disaster. Secondly, the paper discusses the role of disaster as a stimulant in the following areas. (1) Inter regional migration from Bihar to other states. (2) Rural-Urban migration (3) Inter- Urban migration (4) Intra-Urban migration (5) International migration e.g. from Bihar to Nepal, Bhutan etc, (6) Migration on the basis of numbers e.g. individual and masses. (7) Temporary and Permanent Migration due to disasters. The paper also tends to analyze the trends and patterns of migration in areas, which are affected by flood but are economically well-off, having opportunities of employment and good agricultural output. It also examines the distance Decays Laws of E.G Ravenstein (which is based on generalizations on empirical studies of population movement) in flood-affected areas of North Bihar. It studies (a) the migratory nature of population in rural and urban areas i.e. whether the natives of town are less migratory than those of rural areas (b) migration factors operating in areas of origin (c) factors operating at destination and

(d) factors that act as intervening obstacles. In the consequences this paper will analyse that migration has brought a greater number of AIDS cases and other epidemics and there has been acute shortage of manpower and skilled and unskilled labourer. Further the concluding part throws a light on the role of Government of India and UNDP Disaster Risk Management Programme in lessening the effect of migration in the flood affected

## **DISASTER THAT HIGHLIGHTED HIDDEN SOCIAL DISASTER**

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One of the few States of India that had never experienced major disaster, except cyclone was Tamil Nadu, till December 26, 2004 when tsunami struck and changed the whole scenario. The local community was the first responder. Irrespective of religion and caste, the community came forward and helped the people. For example in many areas in Nagappattinam district, the Muslim neighbours rescued Hindus and vice versa, even helped to remove dead and bury. As a result attention gained through the media, the area was flooded with resources of all kinds and people. This started the next disaster – social exclusion of community in the name of caste or those who were affected. This only brought out the true state of the vulnerable in a developing and ancient popular country, India. In spite of development and technological advancements, there are pockets in the country where people are still living hundreds year back, nurturing the age old discriminative practices and norms.

The community that wanted to reject the food and clothing on the first day, started to hoard relief materials when they came. People who helped each other during the disaster started to alienate each other in the name of the worst affected community. This started the serial exclusion for relief services in the first phase. NGOs who came forward to help the affected community failed to realise this and duplicated the relief material in the same community while excluding others.

Due to the inflation of NGOs, many discriminatory practices and issues of vulnerable groups came to the forefront. The Tsunami Relief and

Rehabilitation Coordination of organizations constituted on December 30, 2004 helped in bringing these issues out. But in many areas, the fishermen communities were very powerful and did not allow relief materials to be accessed by other communities. Sometimes NGOs had to use police force for distributing the relief material amongst the affected dalits and agricultural labourers.

Before the tsunami, struck, the interventions by NGOs were minimum among the fishing community, who resisted any external influence. The Panchayat of fishing community is very powerful and during the relief distribution to vulnerable widows, 50% of the relief fund was retained by the Panchayat for common fund. NGOs had no power and influence to interfere in such matters. The livelihood of the poor people was also badly affected.

Post-tsunami, the NGOs were able to bring some development action and empower people through capacity building, training, small grants, repairing houses, providing alternate income generating skills, etc. But they could not address the mental attitude of the people based on exclusion of certain groups based on religion, language etc. This is an area that needs to be addressed to ensure sustainable development of the communities.

**THE QUESTION OF GENDER IN FLOOD MANAGEMENT: A  
CASE STUDY OF AN URBAN SLUM IN A SMALL CITY IN  
EASTERN INDIA**

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High density of population, poverty, illiteracy and lack of adequate infrastructure are some of the typical features of Sambalpur. It is one of the vulnerable districts which often suffers from various natural disasters, namely drought, flood, earth quake, forest fire, which have caused a devastating impact on human life, economy and environment. We cannot avoid disaster but we need to plan earlier so that we will be well equipped to reduce our losses in future. It is not possible to fully recoup the damage caused by the disasters but it is possible to:

- minimize the potential risks by developing early appropriate warning strategies
- preparedness and implementing developmental plans to provide resilience to such disasters
- mobilize resources including communication and telemedicine services, and
- to help in rehabilitation and post-disaster reconstruction.

The environmental conditions in Sambalpur city in general and in the various slums located within the city in particular are important from the perspective of disaster management. Even though the physical environment of slums is the same for both men and women, it is women who spend the entire day within that environment.

The study presents a case study of a recently occurred flash flood that caused devastation in the life of slum dwellers in the Sambalpur city.

Compared to their male counterpart, women in slum suffer from various problems due to lack of gender perspective in different rehabilitation and development schemes. The recent disaster of Flash Flood of 21<sup>st</sup> August, 2006 has left a long lasting socio-economic-physical and psychological effect on the slum dwellers of Sambalpur urban. The flood has maximum impact on the habitation of Dasmati Colony, Beheramunda, Thakurpada and Stationpada. During the flash flood of 21<sup>st</sup> August, 2006 data relating to analysis in the field were reported. Data were collected from 200 flood affected women through observation, case study and interview methods. The data reveals that there was a gender bias in all rehabilitation packages offered to the victims. Men were extended facilities as head of the household whereas problems of women were not addressed properly by the administration and voluntary organizations. Thus the paper argues that in all disaster management packages, the issue of women is not addressed effectively.