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International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

Gender and diversity for urban resilience: An analysis

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The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies position on gender and diversity

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) is the world's largest humanitarian network that reaches 150 million people in 189 National Societies through the work of over 17 million volunteers.

The IFRC acts before, during and after disasters and health emergencies to meet the needs and improve the lives of vulnerable people.

In all these aspects of our work, the IFRC strives to ensure that gender and diversity are integrated into all of its operations. Gender and diversity work is rooted in its humanitarian mandate to prevent and alleviate human suffering without discrimination and to protect human dignity.

The IFRC recognizes that women and men have different capacities, strengths, needs and vulnerabilities. Each of which can impact on their resilience to disasters and crises.

The IFRC is guided in its work on gender and diversity through the following:

- **The Fundamental Principle of Impartiality:** The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavors to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress. Non-discrimination is the refusal to apply distinctions of an adverse nature to human beings simply because they belong to a specific category, including on the basis of sex or age. All those in need shall be helped. For the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement, impartiality means that the only priority that can be set in dealing with those who require help, must be based on need. Further, the order in which available aid is shared out, must correspond to the urgency of the distress it is intended to relieve.

- **Strategy 2020:** Strategy 2020 strives for equality within the organization and its work, by "ensuring that there is no gender-based or other discrimination in our policies and practices, and enabling greater participation by vulnerable people."[1]

- **IFRC Strategic Framework on Gender and Diversity Issues 2013-2020:** This framework provides strategic direction to the IFRC and its member National Societies, encouraging and promoting gender equality and respect for diversity.

- **IFRC Framework for Community Resilience 2014:** This framework works to support communities to develop solutions which are sensitive to issues such as gender equality, cultural diversity, climate change and violence prevention, in order to strengthen community resilience in a sustainable way.

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Women stand in an evacuation centre housing 266 families after monsoon rains, intensified by tropical storm Trami, wreaked havoc on Metro Manila and surrounding provinces in the Philippines. August 2013

Impact of gender and diversity on disaster risk reduction and resilience

A person's level of risk to a hazard and their capacity to respond to or prepare for a disaster can be affected by a person's gender, level of poverty, social class, age, ethnicity, or disability. Vulnerabilities can be physical, social, economic, or environmental.

Although 'gender' is not just about women, it is a reality that women and girls are disproportionately affected by disasters. This is due to the roles, responsibilities and attitudes attributed to men and women, which impact on their access to resources and information; decision making; participation and leadership. Disasters often exacerbate and reinforce gender inequalities.

Yet as well as having different vulnerabilities, women, men and marginalised groups have unique capacities, and they are 'agents of change' in reducing their own disaster risk.

- If both men and women are not involved in decision-making processes when planning or implementing disaster risk reduction (DRR) and disaster management (DM) initiatives, then only half the population will be accounted for and at least half will not be protected in the event of a disaster.

- Women, men and different social groups, such as people with disabilities, may have different perspectives and knowledge about their social and physical environments that can help prepare for natural hazards and improve effectiveness of disaster response.

Gender- and diversity- sensitive DRR/DM not only improves the conditions for one particular 'target' group of people, it also reduces overall community vulnerability and increases overall community resilience.

Urban risk reduction

Natural hazards such as floods, earthquakes, tsunamis and typhoons are hazards that put cities at risk. Climate change is leading to an increase in the prevalence and severity of many of these, while at the same time, population sizes are growing and urbanisation is increasing on a global scale. These additional factors are raising the risk of human-induced slow-onset disasters, such as air and dust pollution, and enhancing conditions for the spread of infection and disease – resulting in health epidemics.

Examples of gender and diversity based risks and vulnerabilities in urban areas

- **Services and infrastructure:** In expanding cities, housing and other buildings comprise a mixture of temporary and permanent structures. Often, these are infrastructurally weak and not compliant with building regulations, and thus, such structures are vulnerable to sudden on-set disasters.[2] The unplanned nature of rapidly growing cities, including the organization of road infrastructure, sanitation systems and lack of open spaces, are further risk factors.

  These factors are further compounded during a disaster, particularly when a high concentration of people live in an area where vulnerability is heightened by environmental degradation, damage to essential services such as health care and water supply, inadequate housing, and poor solid waste management. These can impact people's individual health, as well contribute to disease outbreaks and health epidemics.[3]

  Vulnerable people, particularly those living in poverty, with a disability or living with HIV/AIDS, may be less resilient to the impact of these conditions unless they are included in, and given knowledge of, how to mitigate dangers. In some contexts information is not delivered to women as it is assumed that men in their families will deliver the information – placing many women who are heads of household, and women whose kin do not share information with them, at high risk.

- **Access to information:** Globally women and girls are systematically excluded from education, particularly those of lower socio-economic status: "876 million people in the world are illiterate, of whom two-thirds are women."[5]

Lower levels of education can impact a person's access to information, confidence and resourcefulness, meaning women may be less aware of, or wholly unaware of disaster risks – as well as preparedness and response strategies, such as early warning systems. Further, such strategies may not be designed for women and therefore will not take into account their needs, skills and abilities.

"In 1991 the **death toll** from the Bangladesh Cyclone was **five times higher for women** than men. Part of the reason was that early warning information about the cyclone and the floods was transmitted by men to men in public spaces, rarely reaching women directly."[4]

- **Gender-based opportunities:** In urban centres situated near coastal areas, skills such as swimming and climbing can save lives. Yet in many countries, due to gendered stereotyping, women and girls have fewer opportunities to learn these skills than men and boys.

  For people who are unable to swim due to mobility restrictions, other preventative and resilience-building initiatives should be considered in collaboration with those individuals.

- **Lack of support networks:** Although urban areas are more socially and culturally diverse due to urbanisation and migration, individuals from minority religious, ethnic or social groups can still be at risk. People who migrate to cities often move away from family, social and community networks, who may have accepted and respected their diversity. This risk can further increase during a disaster in which people are displaced away from their familiar networks. Absence of social structures can also lead to an increase in levels of stress and risk-taking behaviours, such as alcohol and drug abuse, which can lead to negative physical and emotional health impacts. While men, women, girls and boys are all exposed to this, men and boys may take more risks during disasters due to social expectations. This risk-taking behaviour can impact their safety and survival. They may also find it harder to seek support for stress.

Social and economic inequalities to consider in urban environments

- **Greater social and economic inequalities** exist in urban areas. Large populations may mean greater competition for resources and basic services. During a disaster, these limited resources are further stretched. Women, people with mobility disabilities, or people who are subject to stigma due to their health (e.g. their HIV status) may not have the power or status within a community to access their rights or the services they need. Services may also not have resources to outreach to these women, men, boys and girls.

  "Where the socioeconomic status of women is high, men and women will die in roughly equal numbers during and after natural hazards, whereas more women than men die (or die at a younger age) where the socioeconomic status of women is low."[6]

- Today, **women take on many roles in urban environments**. Compared to rural settings, women in urban areas are more likely to go out to work, to contribute as an equal economic partner in their household, and engage in activities such as street vending, formal and informal work. Urban women are increasingly engaged in decision-making in some spheres (workplace, household, community, politics). However, there are still gender-based risks even in the changing urban environment. Compared to men, women are more likely to engage in informal work e.g. manufacturing, where they often receive lower wages, unsafe living and working conditions and no long-term livelihood security.

In these conditions, there is heightened risk of fires and industrial accidents, as well the physical infrastructure not being resilient to the impacts of natural hazards, for example earthquakes. In addition, women usually remain responsible for roles such as childcare, as well as maintaining a traditional role in the home. In such cases, the multiple roles that exist for women, may in the long term lead to health and physical impacts. Impact that can reduce their resilience to disasters.

- **Women usually have less ownership over resources** such as land titles, property ownership, household assets and savings. For women in female-headed households, single women without children, widows or divorced women, this increases the severity of loss during disasters and limits a person's ability to re-build their livelihoods.

- In some societies and cultures, women have greater **societal restrictions** for example needing to be accompanied by a male relative outside the home. In sudden onset disasters such as earthquakes, this can pose immediate risks. For example, women may not be able to respond to early warning information to make a quick evacuation from a building that could be at risk of collapse.[7]

Migrants

- Migrant workers, particularly those who are undocumented, are invisible to the authorities and may exist outside of systems established to protect communities. As such, they may be accidentally or purposefully excluded from awareness and preparedness strategies. They also face low service access, a lack of access to justice and a high risk of exploitative work.

Disability

Disability is gendered, with more women than men living with mental or physical disabilities. Reasons for this disparity include[8]:

- **Women live longer than men**, on average, so they experience more disabilities related with old age. The late stages of pregnancy can also profoundly limit women's personal mobility, along with childbirth and its aftermath. This can be a risk factor especially in urban centres that were not previously designed to accommodate for physical impairments or limitations.

- **Rates of mental illness** are higher among women, for example depression. Fewer social networks in large cities can exacerbate this risk.

- **Chronic illnesses,** such as asthma or diabetes are higher among women. In urban areas where commercialization of food and air pollution are high, this risk increases.

Disaster response and recovery

During the response phase of a disaster, needs relating to gender and diversity are often overlooked. They can be seen as an "add-on" or secondary to what would be considered 'essential' relief, for example distributing food and shelter.

However, by not taking into account gender and diversity needs during relief operations, people can become more vulnerable and their situation may be made unintentionally worse as a result of the relief being distributed inequitably. If a gender- and diversity- sensitive approach is taken then the whole community will recover more quickly and more efficiently. This will have long-term, positive developmental social and economic impacts – impacts that will help address pre-existing inequalities.

It is well demonstrated that gender and diversity is a priority in the emergency phase of a response, that it adds quality, reach and accountability to operations. Failure to use a gender and diversity approach can result in harmful or poor quality response.

Examples of gender and diversity vulnerabilities in urban disaster response and recovery

- **Personal security:** Poor lighting and lack of security (e.g. locks on latrine doors) at water and sanitation facilities can increase the risk of violence for women and girls in particular. Social taboos regarding menstruation mean many girls and women struggle to maintain adequate hygiene standards after a disaster, because of a lack of resources and lack of private and hygienic spaces. The distribution of relief items can create security risks for women and girls if planning and organisation is poorly designed, for example if the location is far from an IDP camp.

- **Food insecurity:** Traditional roles mean women are usually responsible for household tasks, including ensuring enough food for her family. After a disaster, food insecurity places large amounts of pressure on women as they must provide for their families. This may be further impacted due to a family's poverty levels, highlighting the added vulnerabilities for people of lower socio-economic status.

- **Economic and livelihood insecurity:** Women usually have less control or ownership over assets and financial resources such as savings, loads or access to credit. Land is usually owned by the male head of the household and land rights may not be passed to the women if her husband does not survive the disaster. In these cases, not only has the family lost their main breadwinner, they may lose control over their assets to rebuild a livelihood. Men and women's roles may be forced to switch due to a death or injury in the family e.g. men may have to bear the responsibility of childcare, impacting their ability to carry out their livelihoods if adequate support is not available.

- **Education:** Women and girls typically have less opportunities and access to education. In the aftermath of a disaster this gender-disparity can be further exacerbated. With added strain on families to rebuild their homes or take care of relatives, girls are more likely than boys to be pulled out of school to support this. This has a long-term impacts on girls' education and future development.

- **Migrants:** Migrants, who are not documented, can be excluded during beneficiary registration and therefore may not receive disaster relief, making them less resilient to recover from the impacts of the disaster. Further, migrants whose status becomes informal may be more vulnerable to trafficking and women and men from poor backgrounds often face being trafficked for labour or sexual exploitation and abuse.

Gender-based violence

Violence must also be recognized as a cross-cutting issue throughout activities related to disaster risk reduction (DRR) and disaster management (DM). Violence can affect women, men, boys and girls, however women and girls and men who do not conform to society's concepts of masculinity are usually more at risk of violence as a result of their gender (gender-based violence). **Gender inequality is the root-cause of vulnerabilities to gender-based violence.** Following a disaster, sexual, physical and gender-based violence (GBV) is known to increase.

Key issues of gender-based violence during and after disasters

- The risk of violence in urban areas tends to be more severe due to the close proximity of people and issues of overcrowding.

- The increased anonymity of large cities means that social support is often less readily available. In times of disaster, social structures that do exist can break down and therefore people lose valuable protective networks that could have kept them safe.

- Disruption to people's social environments following disasters can also lead to increased stress within families/communities and, as a result, there can be an increased risk of violence including GBV and domestic violence. In addition, there can be increased rates of alcoholism and alcohol-related violence is frequent in disaster-affected areas.[9]

- Displaced women and girls face heightened risks of unwanted pregnancies and rape. Internally displaced persons (IDP) camps can create an environment that exacerbates sexual and gender-based violence. IDP settlements are often established very quickly to respond to need. However, if these are not properly designed with both male and female involvement they can cause increased security and safety risks for women and girls.

- Competition for scarce resources mean women can be forced to sell their bodies for food and resources to meet their family's needs.

- Gender-based violence may leave survivors with permanent and disabling injuries. Further to disability being caused by GBV, women with a disability are as much as twice as likely to be subjected to domestic violence than women without a disability.[10]

As part of continuing psychosocial support, the Japanese Red Cross organized a "Smile Smile Health Class" for the elderly residents in the community center of the temporary home residents unit. Participants learned how to make a footbath using a plastic bag and a carboard box.

Key action points for addressing gender-based violence in disaster risk reduction/disaster management

- Strategies to prevent GBV should be mainstreamed in all disaster preparedness, response and recovery programmes and in longer term development planning.

- It is important to ensure a balanced number of male and female staff in all stages of the DRR/DM cycle. This will help ensure women's needs are well represented to mitigate environments that exacerbate violent behaviour.

- It is key to ensure full and equal participation of women and vulnerable groups, including people with disabilities, in all stages of disaster risk reduction and disaster management.

- In designing IDP camps or in post-recovery reconstruction, it should be ensured that shelters are secure, i.e. with locks, as well as secure bathroom facilities with adequate lighting both on-site and on the routes leading to facilities.[11]

- It is critical to ensure that health, psychosocial and legal services – with trained professionals – are available for people affected by GBV.

- Increased investment in the amount of research, monitoring and evaluation and data collected on GBV is needed in order to increase understanding of its impacts, root causes and ways to prevent the occurrence of GBV in the future.

- It is important to harness the capacity of youth and volunteers as agents of behaviour change and to advocate for GBV prevention within their communities.

- It is crucial to increase awareness and commitment within National Societies of preventing GBV within their work.

Young student at Tanghas Elementary School, affected by Typhoon Haiyan, but assisted in its recovery by American Red Cross.

Jenelle Eli/American Red Cross

Recommendations

- Ensure gender and diversity-sensitive approaches are mainstreamed throughout DRR/DM and promote the equal participation of women and men and marginalised groups in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of programmes, as well as in policy making, assessments, strategy and tool development.

- Broaden networks with gender- and diversity-focused organisations as part of IFRC's '1 Billion Coalition'. This will extend the reach of urban DRR through community based DRR, focused on excluded groups (women, children, and so on). Ask that the '1 Billion Coalition' mainstream gender as a focus of community resilience.

- Take an active approach to ensure gender-based violence is addressed in DRR/DM and development initiatives.

- Harness the capacity of women: support and promote them to be leaders in their communities and champions of DRR/DM.

- Ensure the systematic collection and use of sex- and age-disaggregated data in all DRR/DM programmes. Collect qualitative and quantitative data to allow for rigorous monitoring and evaluation and a more in depth understanding of gender and diversity impacts.

- Ensure risk assessment and response teams have equal representation of men and women and a proportional representation of other groups within the community, e.g. people with disabilities.

Nurse Yuko Kawai of the Japanese Red Cross explains how many pills to take to a displaced flood victim.

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Resources for further information

IFRC 'A Practical Guide to Gender Sensitive Approaches to Disaster Management (DM)' (2010): This provides a practical overview of why and how to integrate gender into the disaster management cycle, including how to conduct needs assessments and design responses. It also includes core lessons learned from disaster responses in many Asia-Pacific National Societies.
http://www.ifrc.org/PageFiles/96532/A%20Guide%20for%20Gender-sensitive%20approach%20to%20DM.pdf

IFRC 'Minimum standard commitments to gender and diversity in emergency programming' (2015): This presents Red Cross Red Crescent staff and volunteers with a set of Minimum Standard Commitments to gender and diversity in emergency programming. They are designed to assist in the analysis of and response to the distinct needs of females and males of all ages and backgrounds. It outlines minimum standards to addressing gender and diversity in DRR and provides information on gender and diversity analysis in needs assessments, and in beneficiary selection and prioritization criteria. This MSC document is still considered a draft, which will be subject to review after period of use.
https://www.ifrc.org/Global/Photos/Secretariat/201505/Gender%20Diversity%20MSCs%20Emergency%20Programming%20HR3.pdf

OXFAM 'Urban disaster response and recovery. Gender-sensitive WASH programming in post-earthquake Haiti' (2014) http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/pi-urban-disaster-response-recovery-wash-120114-en.pdf

UNHABITAT 'Gender Issue Guides. A Gender Responsive Risk Reduction and Rehabilitation' (2015)
http://unhabitat.org/series/gender-issue-guide/

UNISDR have developed a 20-Point Checklist on 'Making Disaster Risk Reduction Gender Sensitive.' The checklist provides priority areas to make disaster risk reduction gender sensitive in technical, political, social, developmental and humanitarian processes. http://www.unisdr.org/files/42360_20pointchecklistforgendersensitived.pdf

UNISDR 'How To Make Cities More Resilient A Handbook For Local Government Leaders' (2012) This handbook seeks to ensure that education programs and training on DRR are in place in schools and communities and that programs include cultural diversity issues" and "programs are sensitive to gender perspectives" (page 81). It also states in their principles of sustainable urbanization, that they must involve "socially inclusive, gender-sensitive, healthy and safe development" (page 85). http://www.unisdr.org/files/26462_handbookfinalonlineversion.pdf

1 IFRC Strategy 2020: https://www.ifrc.org/Global/Publications/general/strategy-2020.pdf
2 Towards Safe and Resilient Cities. SEEDS India. Handbook.
3 The Urban Health Crisis (1993). Strategies for health for all in the face of rapid urbanization. WHO.
4 Genanet, (2004) in Making Disaster Risk Reduction Gender-Sensitive Policy and Practical Guidelines, UNISDR, UNDP and IUCN, 2009, http://www.preventionweb.net/files/9922_MakingDisasterRiskReductionGenderSe.pdf P. 65
5 Making Disaster Risk Reduction Gender-Sensitive Policy and Practical Guidelines, UNISDR, UNDP and IUCN, 2009, http://www.preventionweb.net/files/9922_MakingDisasterRiskReductionGenderSe.pdf. P.39
6 Neumayer and Plümper, (2007) in Making Disaster Risk Reduction Gender-Sensitive Policy and Practical Guidelines, UNISDR,UNDPand IUCN, 2009, http://www.preventionweb.net/files/9922_MakingDisasterRiskReductionGenderSe.pdf. P.35
7 Adapted from: Making Disaster Risk Reduction Gender-Sensitive Policy and Practical Guidelines, UNISDR, UNDP and IUCN, 2009, http://www.preventionweb.net/files/9922_MakingDisasterRiskReductionGenderSe.pdf
8 Women, Gender and Disaster: Abilities & Disabilities. Gender Note #4. GDN online. https://www.gdnonline.org/resources/GDN_GenderNote4_Abilities.pdf
9 A practical guide to Gender-sensitive Approaches for Disaster Management. IFRC Asia Pacific Zone. https://www.ifrc.org/PageFiles/96532/A%20Guide%20for%20Gender-sensitive%20approach%20to%20DM.pdf
10 Women, Gender and Disaster: Abilities & Disabilities. Gender Note #4. GDN online. https://www.gdnonline.org/resources/GDN_GenderNote4_Abilities.pdf
11 Adapted from A practical guide to Gender-sensitive Approaches for Disaster Management. IFRC Asia Pacific Zone. https://www.ifrc.org/PageFiles/96532/A%20Guide%20for%20Gender-sensitive%20approach%20to%20DM.pdf