Photo: UN Women

# GENDER-RESPONSIVE EARLY WARNING SYSTEMS AND EARLY ACTION

UN WOMEN

## What are the early warning systems and early action?

**An early warning system is an integrated system** of hazard monitoring, forecasting and prediction, disaster risk assessment, communication, and preparedness processes and activities that enable individuals, communities, governments, businesses, and other stakeholders to take timely action to reduce disaster risks in advance of hazardous events or slow-onset changes (e.g., drought). An early action, also known as anticipatory action or forecast-based action, means taking steps to protect people before a disaster or threat, based on early warnings or forecasts. To be effective, early warning systems must involve meaningful engagement with at-risk communities.[1]

## Why include gender dimensions in early warning and early action?

**Gender-responsive data, forecasts, and warnings recognise that men and women access, process, interpret, and respond to information in different ways** given social and cultural organisation of gender relations and the gender division of labor. A lack of a gender perspective in dissemination and communication has been shown to exacerbate the negative impacts of disaster. Women's involvement in early warning systems increases the number of people informed

because they are connected to different social networks and often have specific and different communication strategies that consider women's practices, concerns, and needs, and proposes actions that consider gender issues. Some of the ground level challenges in regions such as Africa include the lack of translation of technical and meteorological reports into simple actionable messages for the community, and inappropriate modes of communication (which do not consider high levels of illiteracy amongst women and girls). Experiences reflect that radios and women's groups and networks at the local and grassroots levels are good sources of communication even though some women are still unable to access the radio, since these are largely owned by men in countries such as Malawi.
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**BOX 1**

## Case Study 1:

*A study in Nepal found that 71 percent of men received early warning information from a formal source, while the majority of women (51 percent) received warnings through informal and social sources.*

Source:  Practical Action (2019)

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1  IFRC (2021) Early warning, early action: https://www.ifrc.org/early-warning-early-action

# What are the elements of a people-centric early warning system?

The four elements of efficient, people-centered early warning systems are:

i.   disaster risk knowledge based on the systematic collection of disaggregated data and gender-responsive disaster risk assessments, including gender and social analysis;
ii.  detection, monitoring, analysis, and forecasting of the hazards and possible consequences for different groups;
iii. official dissemination and communication of authoritative, timely, accurate, use friendly, and actionable warnings, and associated information on likelihood and impact; and
iv.  preparedness at all levels to respond to the warnings received.

# How to develop a gender-responsive early warning and action system

The _Multi-hazard Early Warning Systems: Checklist_[2] provides a comprehensive and gender-responsive checklist for carrying out early warning and early actions. It is people-centric and is structured around the four key elements of early warning systems. It aims to be a simple list of the main components and actions national governments, community organisations, and partners within and across all sectors can refer to when developing or evaluating early warning systems.

The _Gender Transformative Early Warning Systems Checklist_ provides recommendations and good practices case study for a gender transformative approach to early warnings (see _Figure 1_).

**FIGURE 1**

**A checklist for gender aware, responsive, and transformative Early Warning System Practice**



**Gender aware:** Explicitly acknowledge, assess and document the ways in which disasters and EWS impact different gender groups in different ways

**Acknowledge:** Explicitly acknowledge gendered impacts

**Vulnerability:** How does gender impact on vulnerability?

**Assess:** Undertake gender analysis

**Participation:** How does gender impact on participation?

**Examine:** Examine gendered assumptions (including stereotypes and cisnormativity)

**Dissemination:** How does gender impact on dissemination?

**Listen:** Make proactive effort to hear from marginalized gender groups

**Response:** How does gender impact on response?

**Intersectionality:** How do intersectional vulnerabilities exacerbate gendered vulnerabilities?

**Power and Decision-making:** How does gender impact on power and decision-making?

**Gender sensitive:** Adapt project actions (across all areas of the Early Warning System, with proactive consideration of participation and power and decision-making) to improve the effectiveness of EWS for marginalized and vulnerable gender groups

**Gender transformative:** Design policies, approaches and actions to ensure the EWS works effectively for people of all genders. Consider how all aspects of the EWS (including participation and power and decision-making) can support the reduction of gender-based inequalities

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2  Pages 29-47 (Chapter 5)

# Resources

Other readings for good practices with case studies - *Gender Transformative Early Warning Systems: Experiences from Nepal and Peru*

Free online course: *BLAST DRRM: Community Early Warning Systems*

For more information, please visit the *"Early Warning, preparedness, and risk communication systems"* page on the Women's Resilience to Disasters Knowledge Hub a one-stop-shop for all gender and disaster knowledge: *wrd.unwomen.org*