

## **Second Plenary Panel Breakout Session: GRASSROOTS INITIATIVES**

### **DISCUSSION NOTES**

**Room**

**3:15 – 4:15 pm**

**Facilitator:** Darlene Williams

**Recorder:** John Marra

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#### **1) What grassroots initiatives are you aware of that may be similar to the experiences on the panel?**

- Microcredits and Microfinance
  - Microcredits – India, Bangladesh, China
  - Microfinance – Oxfam America in West Africa
- Community-building and Capacity-building
  - Case study in Pakistan following flooding

#### **2) What have been some of the challenges of these initiatives in your organization/country/community that will prevent implementation of strategies?**

- Concerns about “Engendering” in communities that are not well organized/developed, but rather are limited in terms of resources and capabilities. Pre-existing or intrinsic challenges as are difficult to overcome.
- Cultural issues - In the US at least, existing emergency management community do not see gender as an issue, do not understand that gender matters.
- Issues/problems/solutions are not addressed as a community. Tendency is to treat problems at the individual or family level. As a result people do not fully understand the possibilities.
- Disaster risk reduction/gender equality is not seen as a priority issue in the typical grassroots community. A link needs to be made between disaster risk reduction/gender equality and development and sustainability issues.
- For part of the “community” (but not in all cases) there is a sense of fatalism, expectation that there is outside help, waiting for someone to come in and help, rather than relying on existing resources. Need to change this perception.
- Cultural differences mean that one size/type does not fit all. Need to understand the local specifics.
- There are common actions that increase resiliency; question is to what extent they are applicable at the community level?
- The strength/success of a program is often dependent upon the strength/charisma of a given personality or group of individuals.

**3) What opportunities might you be able to use to build gender sensitive tools and implement gender fair practices at the grassroots and community levels?**

**4) What type of support or tools will be required?**

- How do existing community networks function, and how can they be used to support disaster risk management? There is a need to make people aware of the existing networks and the power that they have. An even bigger challenge is to make ‘authorities’ aware that these networks exist, are viable and reliable. ‘Authorities’ come in and disregard existing systems/networks/groups and actions that they have taken/what they have done/what they have to offer. This kills the enthusiasm of the people.
- Everybody thinks of disaster relief from an external point of view and do not take into account/advantage of internal resources. Also there is a need to talk to the people to understand community/local priorities. Internal resources need to be developed early, prior to the disaster.
- Peer to peer training.
- Time is required to build leadership and skills ...to build the community....needed to build an effective program.
- Need to build around projects, with individual members having a role to play, as a means to build an effective network.
- Need to train/re-educate the external authorities/decision-makers. Authorities often do not represent the communities and tend to be dismissive. Authorities need to be convinced that communities have ‘resources’ to offer.
- Need to work from both bottom-up (grassroots) and top-down (agencies, institutions, organizations) simultaneously.
- Need to get local government involved in community discussions, community process, community-based approach. Include in meetings, trainings.....good time to get their attention is during elections.
- Strength in communication between community groups – build networks.

**5) What would be a good measure of effectiveness?**

- Ownership – individuals enthusiastically take up and expand upon the program.
- Sustainability – programs can continue beyond initial external funding, almost become routine, part of the culture. They survive and grow even with the loss of a given key personality or group of individuals.
- Transportability, transferability, integration – approach can be used to address multiple issues, can be linked to pre-existing programs.
- Partnership – connections made between community groups, community authorities/local government, across organizations, across geographic space.

**6) Are there experiences from grassroots initiatives that should be included in the Honolulu Call-to-Action?**

**7) What statement about grassroots initiatives do we want to contribute to the World Conference on Disaster Reduction in Kobe, Japan, January 2005?**