

Resources and Strategies for Engendering Disaster Risk Reduction

Submitted by Mr. Prafulla Mishra

Disaster context in Eastern India

- Large-scale poverty of the region- Approximately 45 % of the total population in the region lives below the poverty line. The reasons are many- few important ones being lack of long term visioning by the Government, non-availability of capital and technology for the poor, poor infrastructure and existing debt burden. Disaster mitigation is not mainstreamed to the ongoing development programmes.
- Recurrent and multiplicity of disasters- (drought- flood- cyclone- heat wave) these are cause of poverty in the region and the impact is severe because of vulnerabilities of the local communities. Eroding coping mechanisms of the local communities increases impact of subsequent disasters.
- Governance and disaster management- Government operates largely on a relief mindset. There is lack of suitable policy framework to provide long-term mitigation solutions to the issues of disaster management. Optimum participation of a strong civil society is not seen and to a large extent, programmes are implemented in isolation. Large amount of Government resources are spent every year towards relief and rehabilitation efforts thereby affecting normal development programmes.
- Increasing feminisation of the disaster impacts- this is indicated through large number of women who are displaced due to disasters/ extra burden on women to cope/ instances of increased trafficking of women in most disaster prone regions.
- Largely inadequate relief and rehabilitation focus on the women by aid agencies and Government.
- Lack of understanding of the impacts of disasters on women's role and participation at community and household level.

Possible strategies for reducing vulnerabilities and achieving gender equity

The following areas are critical to help mitigate disaster risks to the whole communities and reducing vulnerabilities of women. There is a need to provide an institutional framework for the following recommendations and initiate suitable community actions.

- A. Building community capacities, especially women in the communities. Skill building and information empowerment are required on the area of public health and disaster preparedness. Building a 'guild' of volunteers at community level would be helpful.
- B. Building and strengthening community institutions to be able to plan, implement and monitor disaster preparedness and mitigation measures. Providing institutional recognition and resource support for such community institutions. Integrating these bodies in the local Government planning could be one such strategy.
- C. Promoting insurance as a disaster risk reduction strategy especially covering risks of health and livelihoods. Integration of gender issues is possible through targeting livelihoods and creating joint ownership of the policies thereby facilitating ownerships and control.
- D. Engendering the disaster management apparatus of the Government- through staffing, sensitisation and capacity building and resource investment. Identifying specific needs through district and block level contingency plans and addressing them.
- E. Multistakeholder analysis/ research of the disaster impacts on women.
- F. Developing gender minimum standards for disaster response by civil society organizations (in the line of Sphere minimum standards)

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Biographical Statement

Currently working as a Programme Officer with Oxfam GB (since December 2000) and based at the Eastern India office, Kolkata. Primary role is to develop and manage programmes related to disaster preparedness and livelihoods. Specific areas of interest include community based disaster preparedness, water logged area management, promotion of insurance as a disaster preparedness strategy, and mainstreaming gender issues in disaster management programmes. Have also led disaster response and rehabilitation programmes of Oxfam GB during floods of 2001 and 2003 and drought in 2001.

Before joining Oxfam GB, worked for 6 years as the State Project Coordinator for a Participatory Mangrove Management Programme implemented by the M. S. Swaminathan Research Foundation, Chennai, India.

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