

PROCEEDINGS: WORKSHOP ON GENDER AND DISASTERS

MULTAN, PAKISTAN 6-8 MARCH 1996

DURYOG NIVARAN

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INTRODUCTION

The workshop on Gender and Disaster was held on March 7 and 8 in Multan Pakistan.

The workshop came in the aftermath of the formation of a network of South Asian organisations involved in disaster mitigation work. Five South Asian countries were represented at the workshop- namely Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal. The participants greatly differed in expertise and experience. The workshop was attended by representatives and officials from the South Asian network- Duryog Nivaran, researchers, individuals with field experience in disaster management, case study presenters and media personnel from different South Asian countries.

The objectives of the workshop were,

1. to present the gender perspective in an alternative approach to disaster mitigation, to the media personnel of South Asia
2. To initiate debate and discussion in the media on gender concerns in the dominant and alternative approaches to disaster management.
3. To initiate a process of positive relationships between the media and NGOs

The alternative approach to disaster management was exemplified by the case studies presented during the course of the workshop. Six case studies from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka were presented at the workshop. Due to certain travel restrictions, the Indian case study presenters were unable to attend the Multan workshop. Three of the presented studies dealt with natural disaster situations, i.e. floods; two with man-made disasters; and one with media activity during and after disasters. The first five case studies were all focused on the alternative perspective to disaster management and the empowerment of women in the aftermath of crisis. The idea was to give the media personnel present some field experiences of looking at disasters from a new, gender centered approach. The purpose of this was as much to give insights of the alternative approach to the press as to create public awareness of the concerning gender issues through the available media.

The case studies were prepared by researchers representing various organisations actively involved in disaster management work in the region- be they natural disasters like floods or man-made crisis like insurgency. The studies were based upon,

- * Real life experiences of the organisations in approaching village communities
- * experimenting with gender sensitive approaches, empowerment of women

- * Dealing with bureaucracy and government agencies riddled with male chauvinism
- * Attempts at softening obstructive traditional social structures
- * Experiences of NGOs on media coverage of disasters.

The studies mainly dealt with the situation of women in disaster prone areas and the reasons for their increased vulnerability to crisis. Several dealt with the individual experiences of agencies implementing schemes to empower women during the rehabilitation phases of a given disaster.

They dealt with preparations for the project, introducing the project, implementation and problems encountered in the process and well as successes.

One case study from Bangladesh examined the way media institutions worked and responded in times of disaster. It examined the working mechanism of the press and the forces behind it-bringing into focus several inadequacies in disaster reporting due to the very nature and commercialisation of media. The focus was also on how NGOs and governments use the media for individual's purposes in times of disaster.

These case studies provided the basis for dynamic discussions and debate on several important issues.

The workshop also allowed opportunity for journalists and NGO personnel present to examine the issues that tend to alienate them and figure out practical means through which the chasm of understanding between the two could be bridged. It was important to discuss various means of ensuring better communication between NGOs and media, that would eventually lead to better reporting as well as enhanced transparency in NGO activity.

Follow Up Action Plan

The action plan formulation was also done in two groups, chaired by the same persons as the previous session. Follow-up action was divided as national and regional-the two groups, A and B handling each. Both groups dealt with two central issues in their Action Plan.

Gender and Disaster
Media and NGOs

Group A concentrated on formulating a follow up Action Plan on a regional level while group B had the responsibility of coming up with a cohesive strategy to deal with the above issues on a national level.

Group A came up with a series of proposals, plan and ideas that could be practically implemented within the region. Each member of the group contributed to the action plan by putting down their proposals in paper. The group as a whole concentrated on regional level cooperation between media organizations and NGOs with special reference to information sharing and continuity of Duryog Nivaran's work in eliminating gender bias and promoting a gender sensitive approach to disaster mitigation in South Asia countries.

The proposals of the group could be very broadly catergorised as dealing with

- NGO and media relations
- Gender and Disaster relations
- Media in disaster situations

NGO and Media relations

- Timely disclosure of relevant information to the media
- Ensure information flow from NGOs to media
- Keep regular contact with media
- Duryog Nivaran should build up rapport with South Asian media
- Analysis of media outlets, personnel and coverage in South Asian countries
- Regional study to ascertain media capacity and identify interventions to bring media in an interactive development partnership with NGOs.
- Communication strategy for Duryog Nivaran
- Identify at least two media people from each country for Duryog Nivaran coverage's.
- Form committees at district, national level for media and NGOs.
- Bridge the difference in perception
- Gender training for journalists

Gender and Disaster Issues

- Analyse economic-political relationship of gender and disaster
- Study and implement a process of public consultation and participation.
- Incorporate gender issues in disaster preparedness.
- Better case studies on gender and disasters for background data
- Database of disasters to discern local, regional patterns
- Study the causes of gender discrimination
- Document both success and failure in gender and disaster work
- Use of public interest litigation
- Analysis of relevant international conventions and laws
- Gender training and formulating guidelines for Duryog Nivaran and other institutions
- Produce guidelines for case studies – a single format makes easy analysis
- Follow up this event on exchange of experience on gender and disasters.

Media in Disaster situations

- Sensitive both local and foreign media on gender and disaster related issues.
- Identify areas that media personnel need help when reporting on disaster situations.
- Establish contact groups and continue to learn from each other's experience in using the alternative approach.

Group B

Group B had a two-step approach to the issues before them, the group first brainstormed for ideas and suggestions on formulating future action. Every member of the group wrote in their ideas in this session, then the group came together to prepare a practical action plan including a time frame for future activities where ever possible

The results of the first session's brain storming could be briefly classified into gender and disaster work and NGO-media relations.

Action for Gender and Disaster work

- In Pakistan there is a need to widen the definition of disaster
- Lack of understanding of gender issues in South Asian countries

- What contribution would gender equality make towards successful dealing with disasters?
- Empower women economically to reduce physical insecurity before, during and after disaster.
- Women are not passive victims-an actual change in development workers attitude towards gender discrimination is necessary
- Wider NGO activity to tackle non-natural disaster action for Media-NGO relationship
- The cause of disasters are beyond NGOs but they have potential for good stories that might stir someone...
- Why there is a lack of trust between NGOs and media
- NGOs and media should have better relations
- How to develop relations with media-methods, means and process
- Better relations with media and NGOs at national and international level
- Methodology for two-way communications
- Journalists lack money and resources to investigate stories in depth.

In the next step Group B members came together to prepare the action plan. The final Action plan was presented under four headings and relevant future action for each issues.

1. Widen the perception and role of NGOs in disasters and prioritise gender issues
 - a. Educate relief organizations and media on gender issues
 - b. Organise training
2. Improving NGO-media relations
 - Story ideas from Duryog Nivaran and members for media follow up
 - Organise debates on development issues
 - Photographs, train NGO officials in positive image photography, establish a library and make pictures accessible
 - Prepare and circulate a collection of positive disaster related journalism to agencies and journalists to reinforce group practice
 - Sharing information and advocacy material among countries
3. Strategising gender issues (active role of women in disaster preparedness and management.)
 - Review disaster responsive plan
 - Organise training for community women on gender issues and disaster management

- Exchange of information between Duryog Nivaran members on specific country experiences – copy training modules and evaluation of others.

3. Continuity in process

- Compile 2 quarterly report by Duryog Nivaran for dissemination among members – media and NGOs.
- Duryog Nivaran secretariat to compile and disseminate articles supplied by indigenous organizations-within the next three months

ACTION PLAN

Summary

The action plan was formulated under two groups concentrating on national and regional strategies respectively. Both groups tackled two central issues in their Action Plan formula

- Gender and disaster
- Media and NGO relations

Follow up action put forward by the two groups had a number of similarities, both groups advocated better NGO and media co-operation in the future and put forward strategies to go about creating harmonious relationship between the two. Both groups also realized the need to expand the work being done by Duryog Nivaran in South Asia to pave the way for gender sensitive interventions in disaster and development.

The regional Action Plan recommended a continuous flow of information from NGOs to the media. They also endorsed an analysis of media outlets and personnel from the region to identify their strengths and weaknesses. The Action Plan also endorsed choosing two or more journalists from each country to be actively involved with Duryog Nivaran. Gender training for journalists as well as developmental workers was considered a practical step.

To overcome gender problems in these countries, more depth studies were recommended. The need to create data banks and documented more frequently the experience of Duryog Nivaran members so that this knowledge could be shared. Guidelines should be prepared for the case studies. The group also felt that the region did not make adequate use of public interest litigation and international conventions and laws that protect the rights and status of women. The regional follow up activity recommended a regular exchange of experiences on gender and disaster through contact groups comprising of NGOs and media.

The national Action Plan advocates training of relief workers at grassroots and journalists on gender issues in order to widen the perception of disasters and encourage gender sensitivity in activity and reporting.

They recommended educating community women on disaster preparedness and exchange of information between Duryog Nivaran members on their experiences with using the alternative approach.

On media and NGO relationship, the group put forward a number of suggested follow up activity which included providing media people with story ideas originating from Duryog Nivaran members. Maintaining a photograph library of disaster and development work which is easily accessible to media, collecting and disseminating examples of positive disaster related journalism and sharing information between countries and states were important steps towards improving NGO-media relations.

Both groups recognized the importance of continuing the processes of experience sharing initiated at this workshop. The Action Plan recommended the compilation of a

quarterly report on disaster related experiences, which should probably include reports from grassroots organizations and be circulated among media and Duryog Nivaran members.

COMMITMENT OF MEDIA

The workshop on Gender and Disaster was attended by selected media personnel from almost every South Asian region country. The workshop objectives included exposing the media to NGO experiences of working with the alternatives perspective-therby sensitizing journalists to specific gender issues that crop up in disaster management and development activity, and strengthening bonds between the media and NGO organizations.

Duryog Nivaran felt that. The gender issues that they sought to address in their alternative outlook on disasters and development, were not fully understood or appreciated by the media, this has led to a lack of sensitive in depth-reporting on gender consideration during disasters and rehabilitation phases.

The paper presented on media in disaster situations threw light on the way media organizations and journalists act upon disaster situations. The media. The paper pointed, went about reporting on a crisis situation with the sole intention of finding a 'good story' or 'lead'. Fiercely competitive media organizations vied for larger numbers (of affected) sensationalized pathetic living conditions often using gory pictures of dead and suffering. Reporting the plight of women (and children) was mostly to add drama to the story at hand. Very few journalists or media organizations followed up their stories to the post disaster and rehabilitation phases.

The media had its own problems. Management and editorial policy, political pressure, lack of personnel and resources, difficulty to access information were some of the problems faced by journalists when covering disasters. The lack of training and awareness on gender issues was also considered a problem for South Asian media people who generally do not specialize in subject coverage's due to the lack of staff in the media organizations.

At the evaluating sessions, the journalists present agreed that the workshop has provided them with a new outlook on disaster management. The case studies on using the alternative approach clearly provided the media with insights into NGO activity in rehabilitating disaster affected communities while building the capacity of community women to face to emergency situations. The presentations gave way to lengthy, if at times volatile discussions on gender issues and the alternative approach. All this served the purpose of adding to the media's understanding of Duryog Nivaran's work and the importance of gender considerations in disaster situations. The media personnel present agreed that this exposure to NGO work sharpened their senses and increased their understanding of gender and disaster relations, and would therefore, influence their future work-writing, editing or producing in a positive way.

A point that came out quite clearly during the workshop was that the media should have better access to NOG work and research results. Again and again the fact that there is a distinct lack of trust vis-à-vis communication between agencies and media was emphasized. The importance of information sharing within the countries of the region was recognised by both parties. Informal networking was encouraged to share within the countries of the region was recognized by both parties. Informal networking was encouraged to share reports, story ideas, experiences and research between countries.

Especially because the region is seemingly host to a range of natural and man made disasters ranging from floods to earthquakes to civil and inter-borders war.

The journalists present agree to share information among themselves to foster better relations and their addresses and contact numbers were circulated to aid this informal networking.