



Key messages

- A gender perspective to disaster risk reduction highlights how hazards affect men and women, and boys and girls, differently. This brings attention to distinct vulnerabilities and capacities to face and recover from loss and damage caused by disasters.
- Gender mainstreaming is now embedded in all international policies and agreements of the United Nations and development organisations. Tackling gender inequality is a key component of reducing disaster risks and a cross-cutting issue of the Hyogo Framework for Action.
- Yet, gender inequality remains pervasive: policies are not automatically followed up in practice, while the best grassroots practices do not necessarily influence policies.
- For the next international framework to effectively mainstream gender equality in disaster risk reduction, policy-makers must not simply see women and girls as a homogenous vulnerable group. They must recognise and act upon existing grassroots mechanisms to enhance communities' capacities to deal with disaster risks.
- To ensure accountability, the second Hyogo Framework for Action must dedicate the responsibility for assessing progress in gender mainstreaming to an independent institution.

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How should the new international disaster risk framework address gender equality?

Introduction

Today, international development policies have an increased focus on gender inequality. This is thanks to decades of lobbying by women's organisations to improve women's status and promote equal participation in economic, social and environmental decision-making. The Beijing Declaration, agreed at the United Nations (UN) 'Fourth World Conference on Women' in 1995, called on governments to design and implement effective gender-sensitive development policies and programmes, with the full participation of women at all levels. However, by the end of the 1990s there was no significant progress in reforming legal, political, economic and social structures.¹ In response, the UN made the empowerment of women and the promotion of gender equality one of the eight internationally agreed Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to be realised by 2015. The approach adopted by the MDGs focused on achieving equality in education and improving maternal health, but it excluded key aspects of gender relations such as gender-based violence and did not address disaster risk.

Disaster risk reduction (DRR) is a fundamental component of sustainable development.² It aims to reduce the risk of a hazard becoming a disaster through interventions that address the root causes of vulnerability and exposure. These include the interacting socioeconomic, cultural and political factors that make certain people more likely than others to be affected by natural hazards, and which create different vulnerabilities within communities such as between men and women, boys and girls.³ For example, political and power structures, and the systematic and institutionalised under-representation of marginalised people at different levels, can create and aggravate gender-based inequities and other forms of exclusion,

preventing the reduction of disaster risks.⁴ Attention to gender equality in DRR is crucial for creating resilient and sustainable communities.⁵

While mainstreaming gender issues within development is now part of the international political agenda (i.e. ensuring that gender perspectives are central to all activities), challenges remain which limit progress. This policy brief reviews progress in gender-sensitive DRR, highlights some of the gaps to be addressed in policy and practice, and provides key recommendations, particularly for governments and with regard to the second 'Hyogo Framework for Action' (HFA2) for global disasters.

The gender dimension of disasters

Both men and women are affected by hazards and the impacts of environmental change, but their vulnerabilities to risk and their responses differ; men and women face, cope with and recover from disaster losses and damages in different ways. The literature shows that socially constructed status, roles and norms are gendered, and intersect with age and/or ethnicity to create unequal levels of marginalisation between men and women. This restricts women's ability to access, secure and sustain livelihoods, which are crucial for coping with and recovering from disasters. Men's and women's distinct roles and daily activities further shape their susceptibility to be exposed to and suffer from hazard impacts and climate events, often to the detriment of women.⁶ Examples from Indonesia, Haiti and the United States of America (USA) show how women can be disproportionately affected by disasters (see Box 1).

The examples in Box 1 illustrate how the combination of power structures, intra-household dynamics, decision-making processes in and out of the home, as well as inequalities in terms of workloads, employment and income, restrict women across the world from accessing economic resources and achieving control over their lives. This undermines their ability to anticipate and prepare for major disasters, for example by hindering their access to formal education and early warning systems.

A gender-sensitive approach to DRR helps to identify how hazards affect men, women, boys and girls differently, and the causes that shape people's specific vulnerabilities, concerns and needs.⁷ However, a gendered perspective also involves highlighting the different capacities that men and women develop when facing and recovering from disaster impacts. Evidence-

based studies have demonstrated that although women and girls are likely to suffer more from disasters than men and boys, they also participate in, and sometimes lead, disaster preparedness and/or recovery initiatives.⁸

Women usually have an active position in maintaining kinship links and carrying out social requirements in the community. These strengthen social resources, which help people respond to a crisis.⁹ They can also quickly

Box 1. Evidence of gender-differentiated disaster impacts

Disasters often cause higher mortality rates for women than men

Using a sample of 141 countries over the period 1981–2002, Neumayer and Plümper (2007)¹⁰ found that on average, disasters kill more women than men and narrow the gender gap in life expectancy. Following the 2004 tsunami in the Indian Ocean, 77% and 72% of the deaths in the districts of North Aceh and Aceh Besar, Indonesia, were female. In Cuddalore, India, 62% of people who died were female.¹¹ An Oxfam report on the tsunami stated that “many women died because they stayed behind to look for their children and other relatives; men more often than women can swim; men more often than women can climb trees”.¹² The tsunami also hit women harder because activities traditionally carried out by women combined with the timing of the waves, meaning that women in many areas were more exposed to the tsunami. For example, women who were indoors or working on the shore were more impacted by the waves than men who were fishing at sea and whose boats floated above the waves.

Disasters can exacerbate gender-based inequalities and vulnerabilities

Hurricane Katrina hit the southeast of the USA in 2005, with a major impact in the city of New Orleans. A gender-sensitive study of demographic changes shows that prior to Katrina, New Orleans had a higher rate of vulnerable women than the USA in general.¹³ After the disaster, the economic gender divide widened, with a decline in the average earnings of women and an increase in the average earnings of men. The wage gap is even more striking when taking people's ethnicity into consideration: “In the year immediately following the storm, the median earnings of White, Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino men increased. In contrast, only the average earnings of White women showed a slight increase; the median earnings of Black/African American women and Hispanic/Latinas fell.”¹⁴ This shows that the disaster exacerbated the wage gap between men and women, and between women of different ethnicities. Furthermore, rents have increased by 46% since the hurricane, because of the rental housing shortage.¹⁵ Higher rents and lower salaries disproportionately restricted women's access to affordable housing.

There is a higher risk of gender-based violence after a disaster

Women and girls are the primary victims of physical and psychological harassment, sexual assault and trafficking, and these tend to worsen in the aftermath of disasters.¹⁶ Amnesty International reported that the risk of sexual and other gender-based violence significantly increased in relief camps in Haiti after the 2010 earthquake, stating, “the earthquake shattered what few protection mechanisms did exist”.¹⁷ Relief efforts concentrated on providing people with basic medical attention, food and water but “little attention [was] paid to the equally important right of women and girls to be protected from sexual violence”.¹⁸ In the Philippines, recent reports warn that women and girls in provinces affected by typhoon Haiyan face an increased risk of violence, sexual exploitation and trafficking.¹⁹

mobilise survival skills acquired through the stereotyped gender division of work. These skills, which include cooking and caring for children and the elderly, help the entire household cope better after a disaster.²⁰ For example, following the floods in 2007 in Jakarta, Indonesia, women inhabiting informal urban settlements organised an emergency kitchen to cook and distribute meals to other affected residents.²¹ In Vietnam, women and girls are active in disaster risk preparedness, engaging with and helping to set up technical training in DRR and community-based early warning systems.²² Such coping strategies, often supported by grassroots organisations, highlight the intrinsic knowledge, skills and other capacities that both men and women assemble to help them cope with and recover from disasters.

The disproportionate impacts of disasters have encouraged greater consideration of how gender disparities affect access to relief assets and services during and after a disaster, and the ability of individuals to be involved in DRR planning. To adequately address vulnerability to risk, DRR planning must acknowledge and act upon inequalities between people's identities, statuses and roles. Likewise, DRR efforts can draw on people's existing skills and actions to strengthen existing capacities and improve the resilience of households and communities to disaster risks. By failing to address the gender inequalities that contribute to creating disasters in the first place, there is a risk that DRR programmes will be rendered inadequate.²³

The gap between policy and practice in gender-sensitive DRR

At first, the integration of gender issues into DRR policy appears to be robust. In addition to international conventions that specifically tackle gender inequality,

such as the 'Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women', which was adopted in 1979, gender mainstreaming is now embedded in all official UN conventions and agreements.

These agreements include the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA),²⁴ which aims to build the resilience of communities to disaster risks. This framework, established in 2005, identified gender as important for each priority action:

"A gender perspective should be integrated into all [disaster risk management] policies, plans and decision-making processes, including those related to risk assessment, early warning, information management, and education and training."²⁵

As such, the HFA provided a promising policy framework to consider gender-differentiated vulnerabilities and capacities. For example, it emphasised the need to ensure community participation in DRR, make DRR knowledge and training accessible to the most vulnerable people (including women, children and the elderly), and promote the implementation of DRR initiatives that empower them. The clear consideration of gender in early warning systems, information, training and education was also highlighted as a fundamental component of reducing risk.

In addition, an increasing number of gender-sensitive guidelines for DRR and reports of good practices are being published.^{26,27} International non-governmental organisations (NGOs), including Oxfam, Care and Plan International, have also been active in gender-sensitive programming in both DRR and climate-related initiatives. One of Oxfam's commitments is to undertake context-specific gender analysis and to create an enabling environment for women to define their risk-reduction priorities.²⁸ The 'Disaster

Risk Reduction and Humanitarian Programme' that Oxfam implemented in Nepal followed this approach and supported the establishment of 42 women's empowerment centres to lead DRR and emergency response work in their local communities.²⁹ Another example is the development of the 'Kyrgyzstan Climate Risk Profile' by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and CAMP Alatau, with support from the Climate and Development Knowledge Network (CDKN).³⁰ Based on a gender-sensitive climate-risk assessment approach, this pilot study enabled the identification of appropriate DRR measures. These build on the different and complementary knowledge of men and women, and their different capacities to respond to disaster risks.

However, despite some good practice examples, the mid-term review of the HFA suggests that overall there has not been enough progress in the integration of gender perspectives, cultural diversity or community participation as cross-cutting issues in DRR.³¹ Gender equality is gradually being incorporated into international disaster-related policies, for example those by UNDP, the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Risk (UNISDR) and UN Habitat. At the national level, however, there is a clear lack of attention on gender, and on broader social exclusion, in relation to DRR. The majority of governments do not systematically collect gender-disaggregated vulnerability and capacity information.³² Only six out of 62 government statements to the Global Platform for Disaster Reduction explicitly mention the need to further integrate women, as well as children, into DRR: Canada, Finland, the Republic of Korea, Nigeria, Norway and Sweden. Similarly, analysis of 40 HFA National Progress Reports for 2013 shows that only 11 countries have conducted gender-disaggregated vulnerability and capacity assessments. The awareness,

recognition and implementation of gender-sensitive DRR are highly variable across countries (see Box 2).

Even if national-level policies recognise gender as an issue, the Huairou Commission's report 'Women's Views from the Frontline' shows that women are excluded from emergency preparedness and response programmes.³³ Fordham (2012) also stresses that "while gender mainstreaming has become a familiar exhortation", the majority of authorities' and NGOs' strategies either overlook gender issues or target women based on an ad hoc basis.³⁴ DRR programmes in particular do not systematically separate the needs and vulnerabilities of women and men. Instead, they focus on gender-neutral hazard impacts, assume male-headed households, underestimate or overlook men's and women's different skills, knowledge and capacities, and do not include beneficiaries' (men's or women's) voices in the design of DRR measures.³⁵

This echoes the gap between progress made in forming DRR policies and what is actually being implemented. There is already a divergence between how disasters and climate change should be tackled in theory (e.g. the recognition of the root causes of disasters, the enhancement of people's capacities, the sustainable reduction of vulnerability) and the actual practices, which overlook these areas. The same divergence is seen in the mainstreaming of gender in DRR and climate-related initiatives. Attention to gender equality is slowly being included in international policies but is not automatically followed up in practice, and nor are the best grassroots practices influencing policies.

An in-depth study³⁶ assessing gender mainstreaming in DRR, conducted as part of the mid-term evaluation of the HFA, has pointed out the lack of attention to scaling up gender-sensitive practices from the local level.

These can have a significant effect: for example, the inclusion of grassroots women's organisations in the design and implementation of DRR activities is crucial to helping people recognise the complexity of power relations and support change at the local level. The report notes that the work of grassroots women's organisations does not focus exclusively on women but affects households and communities as well. As such, "they often work alongside men to realize shared goals."³⁷ A country-level review of the HFA also stresses that grassroots women's organisations have been excluded from national DRR and recovery programmes, despite evidence that women-led organisations contribute to the reduction of everyday risks and advance community development.

In response to the continuing lack of recognition and action on gender, the 'National HFA Monitor Process for 2013–2015'³⁸ focuses attention on gender through a set of indicators that cut across the five priority actions. The process recognises the need to identify and build upon gender-differentiated information and mainstream gender in the design and implementation of DRR and recovery programmes. The 'Local HFA Monitor Process' encourages local governments to assess how much has been done to support the most vulnerable people (particularly women, the elderly, infirm people and children) to actively participate in DRR decision-making and planning processes. It further refers to gender in relation to the provision of education programmes

Box 2. How different HFA National Progress Reports consider gender

Kenya

The Kenyan Government emphasises that state institutions, NGOs and the private sector have actively addressed gender disparities that increase women and girls' vulnerabilities to disaster risks, particularly in relation to HIV/AIDS: "The new constitution now provides better opportunities for women and girls in natural resource ownership and management, which could promote further sustainability of such resources."

Mozambique

Mozambique also places special attention on gender-sensitive DRR and climate change adaptation efforts. The Commission on Social Action, Gender and Environment monitors government measures to reduce the vulnerability of disadvantaged groups before and after a disaster. Their Progress Report also stresses state efforts to implement social protection programmes, including cash transfers and income-generation schemes particularly dedicated to supporting women and vulnerable children.

France

In contrast, France's Progress Report states that there are no notable differences between the vulnerabilities of men and women to natural hazards. Therefore, authorities involved in disaster risk management do not use any gender-sensitive approaches to inform policies or design programmes. This contradicts the statement from UNISDR's summary progress on mainstreaming gender in DRR in 2009,³⁹ which appraised France's DRR plan for specifying that actions must reach both men and women.

UK

Similarly, the United Kingdom (UK) report indicates that gender does not constitute "a major issue [...] as equality law in the UK is designed to ensure that discrimination does not exist for age, gender, disability etc."

Source: HFA National Progress Reports (2013)⁴⁰

and DRR training in schools and communities. Finally, the UNISDR work programme for 2014–2015 has identified the promotion of gender-sensitive DRR as one of its strategic results. This will be delivered by building the capacity of government officials to ensure gender policies are acted upon and report on gender issues.

Limits on mainstreaming gender in DRR

Two distinct and common assumptions seem to constrain gender mainstreaming in DRR in practice. The first is that the majority of policy-makers and DRR practitioners tend to see women as passive victims of disasters and merely beneficiaries in disaster risk processes. This is reinforced by the literature, both academic and advocacy-oriented, which emphasises women's disproportionate vulnerabilities but does not systematically highlight their capacities. Highlighting gender-differentiated vulnerabilities and the systematic disempowerment of women and girls is necessary, not only for reducing disaster risks but also to achieve sustainable development. However, this should not lead to the current tendency to label women as a homogenous vulnerable group, because this excludes them further from decision-making processes.⁴¹

Seeing women as passive victims could also enhance the tendency of preparedness and recovery programmes to overlook local capacities and deliver aid that is gender neutral. As power relations can be experienced and expressed in different ways, a gendered perspective is not just concerned with women as an oppressed homogenous group; it gives equal consideration to differences between men and women and recognises the influence of people's social, cultural or geographical contexts, including race, class, ethnicity, religion, place and age. The UNISDR praises the

(theoretical) shift that has taken place, from a purely women-focused approach to a gender-focused perspective where gender dynamics are considered within the broader socioeconomic and cultural context.⁴² But while this shift might have been institutionalised at the international level, it has not in practice at national and, especially, local levels.

The second challenge relates to the assumption, often made by governments and particularly in industrialised countries, that gender equality has been achieved. This prevents it from being an explicit component in DRR. According to the UNISDR, "European countries often consider gender to be covered in DRR by default, through existing equality laws, education and generally gender-sensitive practices. As such, gender issues are not yet specifically integrated in all DRR plans and programmes."⁴³

Yet, there exists a notable difference between believing that men and women have and should benefit from equal statuses and opportunities, and actually ensuring that both men and women have full access to the decision-making processes that affect their lives. For example, statistics from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development show wide wage gaps between men and women who work full-time in high-income countries.⁴⁴ In Australia, France, the USA and the Nordic countries,⁴⁵ occupations that offer high wages are largely dominated by men despite the relatively high score of these countries on the 'Global Gender Gap 2013 Index', published by the World Economic Forum.

Research conducted on DRR and climate change adaptation in the Ladakh province of Northern India illustrates that when gender equality is assumed, it can prevent organisations from systematically ensuring a gender sensitive approach.⁴⁶ Local communities

often emphasise the greater gender equality in Ladakh, where men and women enjoy equal status and rights, compared to the rest of India. Hence, the majority of local development organisations do not consider it necessary to adopt a gender-sensitive approach to their projects, because they do not consider gender equality to be threatened. Yet, a gender-sensitive approach to risk assessment highlighted differences between men and women (and according to their age) in terms of risk perceptions, vulnerabilities and capacities to environmental shocks and changes. For example, the majority of women interviewed were more concerned with, and vulnerable to, increased water shortages than men. This is because women predominantly undertake irrigation activities and the majority of them are subsistence farmers. In contrast, men have more opportunities to earn cash and diversify their incomes sources, which makes them better able to cope with shocks.

Recommendations

The lack of attention to, and the misunderstanding of, gender inequality and social marginalisation undermine the effectiveness of DRR. Not only is gender inequality pervasive, it is also simplified and often perceived as confined to specific countries, cultures or societies. Drawing from the literature on gender and key policy documents, we identify the key areas where policy-makers could help translate policies into practice, in order to achieve DRR that is sustainable from a gender perspective.

- DRR programmes and funding agencies must not generalise women as a homogenous vulnerable group. They must not ignore the vulnerabilities and capacities of men and boys either. The role of socio-economic, cultural, political and power structures, as well as intra-households dynamics, in creating different vulnerabilities and



capacities should be considered when designing programmes.

- DRR research and programmes should systematically adopt a gender perspective that gives attention to other social aspects of vulnerability and capacities (age, class, disability, ethnicity). Methods and toolkits already exist that could help implement context-specific and gender-sensitive DRR (e.g. UNISDR guidelines;⁴⁷ the IFRC Gender Training Pack and Practical Guide;⁴⁸ Care's CVCA handbook;⁴⁹ Oxfam's Participatory Capacity and Vulnerability Analysis⁵⁰).
- National and local authorities, together with NGOs and scientists, must create an enabling environment for grassroots organisations and socially marginalised people to actively and productively engage in DRR decision-making processes. Such processes should not only include women and men equally, but also the full range of social groups, including those who have traditionally been excluded, such as children and youth, the elderly, people with disabilities, those identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender, indigenous people, and minority ethnic and religious groups.
- External institutions should facilitate – rather than control – the development of DRR practices, using bottom-up approaches.⁵¹ Moreover, for the process of empowerment to be effective, DRR strategies must confront power structures and inequalities. This requires the participation of both dominated and dominating groups, to challenge the status quo and the assumption of gender equality in some industrialised and developing countries.

To assist governmental efforts, negotiators of the HFA2 must stimulate action at international, national and

sub-national levels. This includes a need to:

- define responsibility for monitoring and evaluating progress in DRR programming, which must be done by an independent institution rather than governments themselves. This will help to ensure that evaluations provide greater accountability for progress in mainstreaming gender equality
- ensure that the HFA2 monitoring process better reflects grassroots DRR practices, and stresses the need to systematically collect gender-disaggregated data of disaster losses, vulnerabilities and capacities, as well as data disaggregated according to other forms of social exclusion.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank Dr Maureen Fordham and Dr Ines Smyth for their review, which substantially improved this policy brief.

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Front cover photo: Christian Als/Panos Pictures
Editing, design and layout: Green Ink (www.greenink.co.uk)



Funded by:



Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the
Netherlands

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