

Gender and Diversity

Gender and Diversity in Disaster Management and Disaster Law

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Reaching affected people by boat by VNRC staff in Nghe An, Vietnam . © VIFRC

Background

IFRC ensures that a gender and diversity approach is applied across all of our humanitarian work. In practice, this means ensuring that gender and diversity analysis informs and is addressed in all stages of disaster management, whether in disaster risk reduction and resilience, disaster response or recovery programming.

Gender and diversity analysis assists the IFRC to determine who is most vulnerable in an emergency – for instance women, men, boys, girls, people with a disability, migrants and people from linguistically diverse backgrounds will all experience a disaster differently. Our work to determine who is most vulnerable – using a gender and diversity analysis – assists us to allocate our resources in an equitable way, and to ensure that aid reaches those who need it the most. The IFRC Fundamental Principle of impartiality means that we work to relieve the suffering of individuals, guided solely by their needs, giving priority to the most urgent cases of distress.

In disaster management and disaster laws and policies, gender and diversity analysis and programming, helps disaster assistance to be more transparent, accountable and sustainable. It also ensures that aid is appropriate. For instance, if non sanitary materials are supplied to women, public health and waste management issues arise in the aftermath of a disaster. Further, if essential assistance for people with a disability is not part of a preparedness plan, then there is a risk that emergency shelter may not be accessible to those most in need.

Therefore, gender and diversity analysis – which can be as easy as considering what specific needs your local community has in terms of access to aid, safety in receiving aid, and dignity of aid given – will help governments and humanitarian agencies to be effective. By meeting the specific needs of men, women, boys and girls based on their needs and their capacities to cope with disasters, aid will not only build resilience and self-reliance in the face of future hazards and risks, but also benefit community as a whole.

Practical examples of gender and diversity analysis in Disaster Risk Reduction

1) Analysing the distinct roles and needs of men, women, boys and girls: Distinct roles for different genders exist in all societies. Due to social expectations of women and girls, they may be taking care of children or engaged in household management activities when a disaster strikes. Without a gender-sensitive approach, early warning messages may not reach some women or girls within this context, leading to inequitable access to information that may be essential for survival. There can also be an expectation that women will receive 'important information' from the men in their lives, however many female headed households exist. In some countries in South East Asia, there are certain expectations placed on men, which may result in them taking high safety risks in the aftermath of disasters, which impacts their survival and safety. They are often less likely to seek help if they suffer from post-traumatic stress after a disaster. **How to ensure protection for everyone in society is a key concern for disaster law makers and requires some gender analysis.** To build resilient communities, it is essential that there is a common understanding between men, women, boys and girls, including the elderly and the differently abled, about what to do in an emergency. DRR committees, disaster drills, and socially inclusive community mapping that specifically seeks the views of different groups of men, women, boys and girls, is essential to ensure that preparedness plans that are functional and that reach all in our community.

2) Early warning systems (EWS) in particular are an area for focus when considering gender and diversity sensitive disaster management.

Statistically, EWS are less likely to be designed to target women or designed in ways women can best receive essential information. For instance, female domestic workers in Asia and the Pacific may not have access to preparedness information unless provided via in-language radio. Further, in any given community, undocumented migrants live outside of the systems designed to protect communities from disasters. Despite state obligations to provide information to all within a territory, migrants may be excluded from DRR/preparedness messages. Another important group of people whose needs are not systematically met through EWS are people living with hearing, sight or mental or physical disabilities. They will have a different perception on the environment around them and may access information differently, they may also face challenges with standard



Malaysian Red Crescent Society assists communities affected by floods through delivery of non-food items. March 2015.

evacuation procedures, or preparedness measures. Steps can be taken to identify community based organisations working with these population groups and local government units of NDMOs can reach out to departments of social welfare in order to plan for, reach and gather the views of these groups on early warning systems.

3) Girls and boys are not always afforded the same opportunities to learn skills such as swimming and climbing. Many women and girls will not have the opportunities to engage in these activities which could turn out to be lifesaving skills. Therefore, within school settings, systematic and equal opportunities to learn such skills should be given to boys and to girls, and further to this, community based education programmes should work with parents to promote the



Minimum standard commitments to gender and diversity in emergency programming
Pilot Version

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The IFRC 'Minimum standard commitments to gender and diversity in emergency programming' (2015) present a comprehensive set of Minimum Standards for gender and diversity approaches that should be ensured throughout emergency programming. These standards are designed to assist in the analysis of and response to the distinct needs of females and males of all ages and backgrounds and guide actors on the ground in all areas of emergency response. This MSC document is available online as a pilot version, which will be subject to review after period of use.

This document, and others, are available to download from the right-hand column of the webpage: <http://www.ifrc.org/en/what-we-do/principles-and-values>

Examples of gender and diversity sensitive disaster relief and response

1) The distribution of relief items can inadvertently place certain groups in more vulnerable positions, making the impact of the disaster even greater. An example of this is through beneficiary registration for relief distribution. There are cases whereby beneficiaries are registered by the male head of household or with home owners only. However this can exclude groups such as single female head of households, widows and people who do not own property, such as nomadic groups or migrants, from accessing aid. This can be addressed by a transparent approach to, and communication of beneficiary selection criteria from government authorities, and from aid agencies. Such messages can be coordinated through local government units, and may entail government departments working with ministries of social welfare or women's ministries to identify who is vulnerable and to communicate that aid groups may only be in a position to reach some of the affected population.

2) In terms of secure housing and livelihoods development, some people in the community (usually based on lesser power of certain gender or class groups) usually have less control or ownership over assets and financial resources such as savings, loans or access to credit. In South East Asian countries, land and assets are predominately owned by the male head of the household. Some people may have less access to either land, or to money to rebuild their lives. Given this, land rights may need a gender and diversity sensitive approach in order to assist people who were highly vulnerable to build back better. Further, it is important that cash for work programmes are promoted on equitable bases, and that participants are given a fair and equal wage; and that flexible working hours are identified for women and men who also have to take care of household responsibilities such as child or elder care, seasonal farming, and household management.

Recommendations

- Collect sex and age disaggregated data on who is most severely affected in emergencies (including casualties and severe injuries), this will assist national disaster management authorities and aid agencies to identify who was vulnerable and why and to ensure that targeted actions are taken to reduce vulnerability of those groups. Collect qualitative and quantitative data to allow for rigorous monitoring and evaluation and more in depth understanding of gender and diversity impacts.
- Harness the capacities of men and women and different social groups within a population by including their representatives in community based disaster risk reduction committees, and in the formulation and review of DRR policies.
- Ensure that gender and diversity considerations are respected and are not seen as an 'add-on' by aid agencies or government departments. By promoting gender and diversity approaches throughout the project management cycle: planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and reporting, aid agencies will be more accountable to the national disaster management authority and to affected populations.
- Review current policies, strategies, tools and programmes and mainstream gender and diversity analysis and sensitivity, including working with other ministries who are concerned with social welfare issues like domestic violence, given that we know this increases in times of disaster.
- Harness the capacity of women and support and promote their capacity to be leaders in their communities of disaster risk reduction and disaster management.

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