

Mainstreaming Gender and Diversity in Disaster Risk Reduction initiatives



The importance of Gender and Diversity in Southeast Asia

Southeast Asia is one of the most disaster-prone regions in the world. Each year, the region experiences disasters that include earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and extreme weather events such as typhoons, floods and drought. Women, men, boys and girls are impacted by disasters in different ways, as are those from minority or marginalised groups. Evidence shows that sexual and gender based violence, which is rooted in gender inequality, increases following a disaster or health emergency. Furthermore, sexual and gender based violence causes social exclusion, high healthcare burden and costs, and results in lower overall gross domestic product.

Given the high risk of disasters in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries, and the limited existing frameworks for addressing vulnerabilities at many levels, it is important that the linkage between disasters and gender and diversity as well as sexual and gender based violence is understood and addressed.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) is committed to ensure that all women, men, girls and boys, irrespective of age, disability, health status, social, religious, migrant or ethnic group are protected before, during and after disasters. **Having effective gender and diversity strategies and approaches in place ensures that protection and assistance reach the most vulnerable populations.**

“In the past we’ve always talked about Gender and Diversity but not really done much concretely, but with RRI support we’ve really strengthened our approach”.

Ms. Ketkeo Oupalavong, Deputy of Advancement for Women and Mother and Children Work Division, Lao Red Cross.



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Gender and Diversity in the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent

IFRC has a global network of gender and diversity advisors and focal points who are available to provide technical advice and support to National Societies. IFRC has actively created partnerships and collaborated with different platforms to ensure the work IFRC and National Societies engage in are in line with global standards new innovations and best practice tools. The National Societies' reach and auxiliary role to governments in their respective countries gives them the mandate to support the most vulnerable in their communities, as well as ability to access populations that other organisations are not able to reach. Each National Societies' independence provides opportunities to ensure that gender and diversity approaches and initiatives are contextualised and relevant to each country, ensuring the needs of different communities are met.



The Regional Resilience Initiative and Gender and Diversity

The Regional Resilience Initiative (RRI) aims to contribute to reducing the impact of natural disasters on vulnerable communities in Southeast Asia and is supported by the Canadian Government and the Canadian Red Cross. The initiative focuses on the eleven Red Cross/Red Crescent (RCRC) Societies in the region: Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, Singapore, Viet Nam, and Timor Lesté.

RRI Gender and Diversity work aims for an improved gender perspective in disaster risk reduction policies, strategies, programmes and tools. It focuses on building National Societies' gender approach at the institutional level to enable them to lead gender-inclusive changes in their communities. Activities focus on building skills amongst focal points within National Societies as well as sharing of best practices within the region and providing technical support to existing projects as well as institutional capacity-building efforts.



The Gender and Diversity Network

The Southeast Asia Regional Gender and Diversity Network was established in 2015 and has been steadily growing and gaining momentum ever since. All eleven National Society leaders have endorsed the Network and have selected gender and diversity focal points/representatives. The Network uses regular teleconferences and annual face-to-face meetings to provide a space for the focal points to share information, engage in peer-to-peer support, along with the opportunity to highlight other gender and diversity work being undertaken in the region. It also provides Red Cross Red Crescent Movement focal points with a platform to discuss challenges and celebrate successes with other gender and diversity focal points looking at similar issues and initiatives.

RRI key achievements

During 2015, a number of National Societies began successfully implementing gender and diversity initiatives within their National Societies as well as nominating and training focal points. In 2016, this expanded to building capacity at branch, chapter and district levels to ensure that capacity for gender and diversity cascaded to all levels within the National Society.

IFRC's gender and diversity work focuses on enhancing the skills and capacities of National Societies so they can advocate more strongly at a national and regional level for the needs of communities in disaster risk reduction.

The RRI's support to National Societies has ensured that gender and diversity has been integrated into Disaster Risk Reduction policies, tools and strategies, and that the IFRC Minimum Standard Commitments to gender and diversity in emergency practice (MSC) have been adapted to local contexts. In some countries, the RRI support is the *only* Gender and Diversity initiative taking place and contributes to ensuring a progressive significant increase in awareness of Gender and Diversity needs within National Societies. Increasingly, Gender and Diversity is being promoted beyond Disaster Risk Reduction into other core Red Cross Red Crescent competency areas such as health, and overall National Society Development.

“The RRI has really helped build my capacity so I can transfer my knowledge on Gender and Diversity to younger generations, which means it’s a sustainable approach”.

Ms. Mom Chanthy, Deputy Director of Health Department, Cambodian Red Cross.²

The Network's Gender and Diversity focal points have strongly contributed to building ownership for Gender and Diversity issues within their National Societies. This means that National Societies are taking the matter seriously and better understand why Gender and Diversity is important and how it can be incorporated into emergency contexts.

“...when gender equality is actively promoted, it can positively transform and enhance individual lives as well as societies as a whole”.

IFRC Strategic Framework on Gender and Diversity Issues 2013 – 2020.

In a short time, the Gender and Diversity Network has secured some impressive results. In **Lao PDR**, the Lao Red Cross has been reaching impressive milestones with its Gender and Diversity agenda. In 2016, the LRC Focal Point mobilised all units of the National Society to develop and endorse ‘the Lao Red Cross, Strategy for the Advancement of Women 2016-2020’.

The strategy was combined with a plan of action for each unit as well as a monitoring system to ensure accountability to the commitments outlined in the Strategy. LRC have adapted and translated the IFRC's Minimum Standard Commitments to gender and diversity in emergency practice (MSC) guidelines for Health and Disaster Risk Reduction. Evidence of practical implementation of gender and diversity standards in needs assessments was evident through the 2016 Lao PDR flood response and the subsequent deployment of the Regional Disaster Response Team member.

Increased capacity of focal points and peer-to-peer support has been evident in a number of National Societies. In the **Philippines**, the Philippine Red Cross Gender and Diversity focal person co-facilitated a regional Gender and Diversity training for the Network, with IFRC. In **Indonesia** Palang Merah Indonesia (PMI – Indonesian Red Cross) has incorporated Gender and Diversity into its programme training agenda and supported inclusive emergency response through inclusion of gender and diversity within emergency response simulations with the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management (AHA Centre).





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Gender and Diversity Network support in the development of disaster law

The IFRC’s Gender and Diversity work also effectively supports ASEAN Disaster Law initiatives. The RRI’s Gender and Diversity and Disaster Law technical advisors have been working closely together to ensure Gender and Diversity requirements are accounted for in disaster law. In **Lao PDR**, RRI efforts have contributed significantly to ensuring the inclusion of Gender and Diversity statements in the country’s draft disaster law.

“I can see a distinct change in Disaster Laws with an emerging gender dimension. I suspect that the IFRC has a lot to do with this”.

Cecilia Aipira, Regional Adviser for Asia Pacific, UN Women.

Close technical collaboration in advance of the Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in 2016 ensured that the Disaster Law checklist was highlighted during the Gender and Diversity thematic session as good practice towards Priority 2 of the Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction. This has become a key regional resource for internal and external stakeholders. Collaboration with partners also ensured effective Red Cross Red Crescent representation and joint advocacy approach at the

Asia Pacific Regional Conference on Gender and Disaster Risk Reduction organised by UN Women and the Government of Japan in Hanoi, Viet Nam.

Moving Forward

Ensuring effective gender and diversity integration in National Society programmes is crucial for supporting women, men, boys, girls and at-risk populations in times of disaster and non-disaster. There is still a long way to go to increase gender and diversity equality in the region, and continued and sustained support needs to be provided if mindsets and behaviours are to be influenced and changed. This takes time, and it is crucial that there are specific, resourced initiatives, with technical human resources in the region, to ensure the continuation of RRI’s work conducted over the past few years.

Moving forward, the RRI must focus on continuing integration of gender and diversity into Red Cross Red Crescent programmes and projects, but also internally - having an impact on the culture and commitment of the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement itself. Key future thematic opportunities and priorities in the region include a focus on data collection and analysis – in particular sex and age disaggregated data; focusing on sexual and gender based violence prevention and response; increasing the analysis of community-level impact from initiatives at national level; and ensuring that we fulfil our commitments to the Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction with a strong focus on women’s leadership and participation.



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