CHAPTER VI

WOMEN AND DISASTERS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter specifically speaks on the women related issues in disaster management. It finds that there may be chance to have gender discrimination while a state in extending its Protection to women. The analysis of this task is to see the consequences of vulnerable section of the society. It attains by compliance with the international conventions as well as legislation passed by the government.

The lives of men and women, the work that they do, the income they receive, the roles they are given and the relationships that they share all shaped by our social norms and so as our tradition which treats them differently. Truly in this age of our living, gender really matters. If the different roles and responsibilities ascribed to men and women are socially constructed, then by definition, they may be changed by society, by us.\(^{241}\) We can do something about this differentially between men and women. Why men are absent and men present when conflict ragged societies, sit down for talks and reconstruct after war? Can women make a difference to peace and security? What can they do to make the world a better place? These are just some questions that are often asked before and sometimes of today.

In olden times, women are defined as a female human being able to receive a child. But at present the concept has changed a lot. Now women have been placed into various ways. Women as the molder for they conceive and give birth to their children, they are the ones who take good care from the baby was born until it grows. It is the women, because the husband is off to work, who is always on the side of their children especially at times that these children becoming aware of what is going on around them in thesis matter, women can also be the teacher the guide, and could be the shaper.

However, despite of these capacities, women become a victim in different ways; they can fall into gender selective abortion and infanticide. Others do not receive the same amount of food and medical attention as their brothers, fathers, and husbands. Others are being prey to sexual offenders. Numerous of women are being killed within their own walls through domestic violence. Rape and sexual exploitation remain, moreover, a reality of countless women, are trafficked and some are being sold. These situations, indeed, prove that women live in a very insecure world.\(^\text{242}\)

It is widely known and accepted that disasters affect women and men differently. The United Nations Handbook of Estimating the Socioeconomic and Environmental Effects of Nations Handbook for Estimating the Socioeconomic and environmental effects of Disaster (2003) emphasized that one consequences of disaster “is then recapitalization of women and the reduction of their share of productive activities in the formal and information sectors.”\(^\text{243}\)

Women are disadvantaged in two ways; “not only do they sustain direct damages or production losses (housing and means of productions), but they also lose income when they have to apply themselves temporarily to unpaid emergency tasks and an increased amount of unpaid reproductive work, such as caring for their children when schools are closed such reproductive work is usually granted a lower status than paid work, it is also a continuous job, which limits women’s mobility and can sometimes even prevent them from exercising their rights as citizens.”\(^\text{244}\)

WHO research says that women and children are particularly affected by disasters, accounting for more than seventy five percent of displaced persons. In additions to the general effects of natural disaster and lack of health care, women are vulnerable to reproductive and sexual health problems, and increased rates of sexual

and domestic violence. Moreover, gender roles dictate that women become the primary
caretakers for those affected by disasters- including children, the injured and sick, and
the elderly substantially increasing their emotional and material work load. Women’s
vulnerability is further increased by the loss of men and or livelihoods, especially when
a male head no household has died and women must provide for their families. Post
disaster stares symptoms are often but not universally reported more frequently by
women than men.245

In addition, gender inequality in social, economic and political spheres results in
vast differences between men and women in emergency communication; household
decisions about use of relief assets; voluntary relief and recovery work; access to
evacuation and relief goods; and employment in disaster planning, relief and recovery
programs, among other areas of concern in disaster relief. According to Enarson,
Women’s work is heavily impacted by disasters, and their economic losses can be
extensive, domestic work increases enormously when support systems such as child
care, schools, clinics, public transportation and family networks are disrupted or
destroyed.246 Damaged living spaces are damaged working spaces for all women. For
those whose income is based on homework, the loss of housing often means the loss of
workspace, tools, equipments, inventory, supplies and markets.

6.2 EFFECTS OF DISASTERS ON WOMEN

Disasters have impacted the lives of women all around the world. Hurricane
Mitch in Central America, flooding in Mozambique, and more recently the tragic
earthquake in Bam, Iran are all examples of recent natural disasters. But how can we
apply a gender analysis to something that is “natural”, beyond the realm of society and
humans? An earthquake does not make a conscious decision to strike, it just happens.247

245 World Health Organization (WHO) and United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR).
247 Brazeau, Ann, Gender sensitive development planning in the refugee context, Paper presented to
It is the impact that these disasters, on the lives of affected people that can, and must be examined through a gendered lens.

The impact of a natural disaster on women has a direct correlation with the position women held prior to the event as well as numerous other factors. As the “Environmental and the Mitigation of Natural Disasters: A Gender Perspective” report explains, “Social vulnerability to disasters is a function of human action and behavior. It describes the degree to which a socio economic system or physical assets are either susceptible or resilient to the impact of natural and environmental changes.”

The social vulnerability to disaster was apparent when Hurricane Mitch struck Central America in October 1998. Because of biological and gender differences, men and women were affected differently by Mitch and made different contributions to relief efforts. Sex and gender specific vulnerabilities determined differential impacts of the tragedy on men and women. For instance, slightly more men died, while more women reported suffering physical and mental health related problems. Similarly, gender specific capabilities shaped men’s and women’s different responses and contributions to relief and mitigation efforts. For instance, more women prepared food in shelters while more men transported victims to shelters. These types of divisions during the initial relief stage appeared to overlook women’s specific vulnerabilities and needs and underplayed their potential contribution to relief and reconstruction.

While the impacts of a natural disaster are devastating there is the potential for a ‘window of opportunity’ during the recovery period, in which women have the chance to make gains. The DAW report suggests that it is important to utilize development opportunities arising from post disaster reconstruction. In order to do this, two

249 Shrader, E. and P Delaney. “Gender and Post-Disaster Reconstruction, the Case of Hurricane Mitch in Honduras and Nicaragua. p.52
opportunities arising from post disaster reconstruction. In order to do this, two opportunities need to be exploited.

- Disasters can highlight particular areas of vulnerability, including gender-based vulnerability, needing to be reduced through environmental, economic and human development.

- Immediately following a disaster the political climate may be conducive to much needed legal, economic and social change which can start to address social vulnerabilities. Some examples of areas that could seize this opportunity include governance, land reform, skills development, and employment, housing and social solidarity.\(^{250}\)

While there is the danger that recovery efforts do not recognize women’s capabilities, and can in fact reinforce or exacerbate existing gender and other inequalities, the post disaster period holds great potential for working to build women’s capacities and challenge gender stereotypes. It is important to remember that women are not only victims but agents of change. It is important to understand women and men, working together, can identify those hazards that are threats to their homes and livelihoods and work together to build safer communities. In late 2000 and early 2001, as Mozambique was starting to recover from its civil war, a devastating flood struck. Five hundred people died during these floods and 500,000 were left homeless. But the people of Mozambique are working hard to recover from the floods.\(^{251}\)

One area where reconstruction work that is just starting to take place is in Bam, Iran, where on December 26, 2003 a major earthquake hit and leveled the ancient city. It is estimated that 43,000 people were killed; an estimated 30,000 injured and up to 75,000 left homeless.\(^{252}\) A group of Women NGOs has set up a Coordination


\(^{251}\) Langton, Patti, Vulnerable breadwinners: women in East Africa. IDRC Reports, 2005 p.8-9.

\(^{252}\) Available at www.apsu.edu/oconnort/rest of URL, visited on 29.03.2012 at 05.30 p.m
Committee in order to collect and attract other NGOs and individuals help for needy people of Bam. They have identified the following immediate concerns:

- Women and children are the most vulnerable groups in the aftermath of an earthquake. They will not be able to reach food distributing trucks and other goods. The Committee’s involvement shall be to assure that these women and children receive basic needs to survive in the coming weeks.

- The experience of previous earthquakes has shown that within few days the disaster is not in the news and the momentum subsides drastically. This is actually the period when the survivors need the most help to reconstruct their lost lives. The Committee’s presence in the region, therefore, aims to initiate and sustain the reconstruction work. 253

- The specific needs of women and children are usually lost in the midst of public announcements issued by the government agencies. The Committee has dispatched an assessment team to Bam region in order to evaluate the immediate needs of the women and children.

All of the examples given have shown that women and men experience the impacts of disaster differently. Also, it is essential for women’s contributions to disaster relief be acknowledged. Women have a very important role to play in the time following a natural disaster. Through their participation it is possible that future disasters will be less devastating. Disaster relief and mitigation is a gender issue recognizing this and empowering women to participate could have unanticipated benefits for all. 254

Disasters have highlighted the special needs of women as well as infants during emergency situations. Gender makes women more socially, culturally, and biologically

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254 Id 47
susceptible to higher risk for morbidity and mortality. The recent tsunami that struck the countries along the Indian Ocean is an example of a natural disaster that affected women and men differently. The ratio of female to male deaths in the tsunami was 3:1. Some of the factors that contributed to such a high mortality rate for women included, amongst the survivors the women were the most vulnerable to social and economic threats, along with the men they had been trust into poverty as well as un employment but due to their societal roles such as caring for family members they could not rejoin the limited female work force as easily as men could rejoin the male work force, many were un accustomed to swimming causing them to drown, and the culturally mandated long hair of women became entangled in the debris also causing them to drown.

Sexual violence is the result universally of emergency situations such as natural disasters. The target of sexual violence is most often women. Women are often forced to provide sex in exchange for food or shelter in emergency situations. In certain societies the psychosocial damages that women suffer as a result of rape affects their integration into society very negatively. Unfortunately, many health providers in emergency situations are not trained to deal with victims of sexual violence. In humanitarian emergencies, communicable diseases, such as HIV/AIDS can spread rapidly where social instability, poverty and sexual violence exist.

6.2.1 Pregnant Women in Natural Disasters

In the recent tsunami, about 150,000 women were pregnant in the affected area. Of those 150,000 women it can be assumed that an estimated 40,000 survived who are now who are living in displaced persons camps, with host families, or in temporary shelters. Pregnant women forcibly displaced by disasters faced as especially have psychosocial and physical load such maternal tress stress is directly proportional with the

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number of babies born preterm or small for gestational age and with the number of spontaneous and induced abortions.\textsuperscript{257}

Pregnant ant locating women are especially vulnerable to lack of sanitation and poor water quality. Infant’s mortality rates are highest amongst infants less than 1 year old in refugee populations. The health of infants is directly dependent on the health of and well being of the mother.

For example: Malnutrition in the mother is associated with infants with low birth weight. Since the infrastructure of health care institutions does suffer during natural disasters it is difficult for mothers to monitor the development of the infant or obtain adequate prenatal and infant care. Maternal anemia can affect iron stores in the newborn. Breast feeding is the optimal source of nutrition for infants; however, in disaster situations this may not always be possible due to material malnutrition or the death of the mother.

In the disaster mental illness that such a population is vulnerable to are depression, anxiety, alcohol and substance abuse, and post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Women have experienced lasting negative impact on their mental health due to displacement, poor nutrition, lack of access to case, social isolation, new head of household status, and exposure to trauma. Women appear to be more vulnerable than men to develop mental illness resulting from disaster situation.\textsuperscript{258}

6.3 GENDER BIAS IN DISASTER RELATED RESEARCH

One objective of this research is to draw attention to gender bias in the scientific literature, in the societies experiencing emergencies. There is no reason to expect disaster related research to be less gender biased than social research in general. However, in light of post disaster sex ratios and relative vulnerability of

\textsuperscript{257} Available at www.ehow.com visited on 20-01-2013 at 12.30pm.
\textsuperscript{258} Psycho Social support and National Health Services in Disasters at www.ndma.gov.in on 16-03-2013
women, contemporary disaster research needs to address the problem forthrightly. Many researchers indicate that discrimination on the basis of sex is implicit in most social systems and at the heart of systematic bias in social science.

Gender bias is also characteristic of assistance programmes. Such bias does not necessarily signify open discrimination against women. Instead, the structure of programmes perpetuates the bias out of expediency as well as a deeply engrained and insidious notion of sexual difference that is part of paternalism. The bias finds comfort in the patriarchal attitudes and patronage of many societies needing assistance. Women continue to be discriminated against due to a gender bias in donor agencies and governments, but also because women’s roles in the local systems are misunderstood or poorly understood. The common Western planning misconception of men as “Breadwinners” interferes with the assessment of women’s contribution.

Administrative gender bias has been particularly noteworthy in the context of refugee populations, although women are also discriminated against in the process of decision making in assistance during the relief and reconstruction phases associated with disasters. These issues are being addressed for refugee populations by the UNHCR. We should note that there have been positive changes.

Until recently, studies have rarely addressed the differences in adaptation of refugee men versus women in host countries. Seldom discussed in their own right, women refugees have been conditioned as “refugees’ or migrants’ wives.” The resulting tendency has been to view women as preservers of tradition with low capacities for adjustment to new conditions. The narrow assessment of refugee

261 World Health Organization (WHO) and United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), 2000 p.67
women and girls incapacitates personnel within camp and settlement administrations from seeing the potential of women as effective agents and mobilized for change and social development at local, regional and national levels.

6.4 Disaster Management and Women: The Indian Context

In India, UNDP’s Disaster Risk Management (DRM) project has been able to mobilize volunteers through the initiative. This sense of civic involvement proved to be an invaluable help during the recent floods in Bihar. Kiran Devi, a 35-year-old, frail and shy woman and a homemaker with two children, displayed the woman power and resilience when the floods devastated the homes in Duwania Chowk in Bihar. She was one of the community volunteers who made a difference by preparing food for at least 2000 people whose homes and lives were washed away by the flood. Kiran made her way through 4 feet of water and also carried food for people in campus about 3 kilometers away from her home. In addition, she provided first aid relief to the injured in the floods thanks to the UNDP first aid training she received in 2007.

The women of Villupuram district in the state of Tamil Nadu have another such fascinating story to tell. Every year when it rains heavily during the second part of the monsoon in November and December, the major interstate Thenpennai River and its small tributary, the Malattaru, turn into demons, devouring rice fields and neighborhoods. Planning ahead of the next round of heavy rains, village women take the lead in preparing communities for the hazards that lie ahead. They learn and teach swimming and rescue, store life jackets and makeshift rafts, and provide training on how to protect the community from the looming floods from both physical and human damage. The initiative is an offshoot of a micro credit programme that a local NGO, Kalvi Kendra, has promoted through women’s self-help groups.

Recently, Nagaland State Disaster Response Force (NSDRF) trained a women’s team, equipped for respond to any kind of disaster. Ninety one jawans of 15

262 UNDP Disaster risk management programme
India Reserve Battalion’s (IRB) Mahila unit recently underwent training at the Central Training Institute at Toluvi, under the guidance of National Disaster Response Force, Guwahati. Similarly, the community disaster resilience fund (CFRF) pilot organized by the National Alliance for Disaster Risk Reduction (NADRR) in 2008 led to channeling of funds directly to communities in 88 villages of 11 multi hazard prone districts of eight Indian states with the objective to address their own resilience building priorities through community and women led initiatives.263

6.5 IMPACTS OF DISASTERS ON WOMEN

In impact of disasters on women is inclusion partly reflects a growing awareness in the international community that full development can only be achieved when women and the resources they represent are fully integrated in the development process and are empowered to improve the economic, social and political conditions of developing countries within a framework of sustainable development.

This addition also, and perhaps chiefly, reflects an understanding that men and women reveal vulnerabilities peculiar to their sex when confronted by disaster situations. In the face of this reality, it is essential to keep a clear gender focus to be able to support women facing a disaster and to reinforce their capacity to overcome these situations. Such awareness can reshape reconstruction task or projects.264

Just as a post disaster reconstruction programme contains projects meant to re-establish production in a given sector; it must contain projects addressing the specific needs of vulnerable social groups. Such initiatives make it possible to mend the torn fabric of society while facilitating economic recovery. It is thus essential to determine the specific impact on the women of an affected country or region in order to design actions and projects that help to reduce their opportunity cost and increase their ability

263 Id p.31
to recover. Disasters should also be seen as an opportunity to improve pre existing conditions, including sex equity. Reconstruction therefore should not be thought of simply as a process of replacing what has been lost, but also as an opportunity to perform actions that make the most underprivileged groups less vulnerable, favor sex equity and improve living conditions for women, especially those who are heads of households.

One of the consequences of a disaster is the de capitalization of women and the reduction of their share of productive activities in the formal and informal sectors. Not only do they sustain direct damages or production losses (housing and means of production), but they also have relatively high opportunity costs because they lose income when they have to apply themselves temporarily to unpaid emergency tasks and an increased amount of unpaid reproductive work, such as caring for their children when schools are closed because they are being used as shelters for disaster victims.

Such reproductive work is usually granted a lower status than paid work because of the greater physical toll that it takes on women. It is also a continuous job, without weekends off or vacations, which limits women’s mobility and can sometimes even prevent them from exercising their rights as citizens. Regardless of whom the head of the household might be, women’s contributions to family budgets are as important as men’s. Although a woman might not hold a paid job, she may generate household income, from a variety of informal sector activities. Whether from the backyard economy or from a small home based business, thus allowing her to combine productive tasks with reproductive ones. Activities of this sort (both productive and reproductive) are not included in official national accounts. However, if the income from them were to be taken into consideration, we would see that men and women more evenly contribute to sustaining a household.
Although the differential impact of disasters on women should be treated transversally throughout the damage assessment (both in their sectoral and geographic dimensions), we have chosen to handle it on two levels in this Handbook. The first is by including in each sector (whether social, economic or environmental) an additional section about the way in which a disaster’s differential impact on women should be assessed.

The second is to include this separate chapter on how to obtain a preliminary estimate of the total impact of a disaster on women and how to orient reconstruction projects towards them. It must be clearly borne in mind (and a mention made of the fact in the assessment report) that this transversal assessment is not fully comparable to overall economic impact findings inasmuch as some valid parameters for the assessment of the impact on women are not included in national accounts. It is also important to avoid problems of double accounting by simply folding the impact on women into the other sectoral assessments, which should have already contemplated such damage and losses.265

6.6 DISASTERS AND GENDER GAP IN THE LIFE EXPECTANCY

Natural disasters affect women more adversely than men in terms of the effect of disasters on the life expectancy at birth, that is natural disasters on an average kill more women than men or kill women at a younger age than men, and the more so the stronger the disaster. Yet the extent to which women are more likely to die than men or to die at a younger age from the immediate disaster impact or from post disaster events depends not only on disaster strength itself but also on the socioeconomic status of women in the affected country. The higher women’s status, the lower this gap is. Thus where the socioeconomic status of women is high the impact on both men and women will be the same but when the socio-economic status of women is lower than in that case more women dies in comparison to men.

This shows that women are vulnerable to natural disasters not because of something natural but it is contingent on the social status enjoyed by women before and after the occurrence of natural disaster. Three main causes that make women more vulnerable in emergency situations are First and foremost is the biological and physiological difference between men and women. Second, social norms and role behavior may lead to a behavior of women that increased their vulnerability in the immediate course of the disaster. And third, disasters may lead to shortage of resources of basic need as well as a temporary breakdown of social order, in which case the competition between individuals become fiercer and existing forms of gender discrimination become exacerbated and new forms of discrimination can emerge. This effect is strongest in countries with very low social and economic rights for women. In contrast, in those countries in which women in their everyday lives have almost equal rights as men natural disasters kill men women almost equally.266

6.7 THE GENDER ISSUE IN DRR

In today’s society, gender issues arise from a complex mix of dynamic factors that include differentiated roles and responsibilities, skills and capabilities, vulnerabilities, power relations, institutional structures, and long standing traditions and attitudes. The specificities of gender relations may vary depending on the socio-cultural values of a society; however, the fundamental gender based divisions of roles, responsibilities and identities largely remain the same throughout the world. As a result, men and women develop different and often, specific skills. They also have different life experiences, and therefore different concerns, needs and priorities. These differences are partly due to biological factors but mostly occur because of social factors.

Compared with men more than 60 percent of the world’s poor are women. Women have less ownership of assets and property. They have fewer decision making possibilities within the family and in the public sphere, and they earn less. Women all over the world are paid less than men for equal work. Also, women are less killed and have fewer opportunities to develop skills. They face greater risk of sexual abuse, domestic and other forms of violence, and are often dominated by male members in the family. Women are socially and economically weaker than men, unequal to their male counterparts and hold a lower status within their communities.

Although women are often more vulnerable than men, the continuous focus on women’s vulnerabilities alone can be contentious, as this promotes the perception of women as victims, rather than as capable and equal actors. This contributes to the current situation where men’s role and responsibilities in DRR and disaster management are highly recognized, whereas women’s skills, capabilities and contributions to DRR remain invisible. As a result, women are disadvantage on both these counts.

The common perception of women as dependent, weak and subordinate acts as a barrier that isolates them from planning and decision making processes. Their skills and life experiences are not identified as resources, and therefore are not incorporated into risk reduction and disaster preparedness, relief or recovery efforts.

Such a dual disadvantage results in deepened vulnerability and dependency, and denied opportunities to learn and grow and provide leadership and contribute to DRR efforts. As a result, cycles of gender based unequal power relations are further intensified and conditions are created for the perpetuation of the status quo. This situation constitutes a tremendous loss to women as individuals and a loss of resource to their families, communities’ and nations. Because of their different role definitions and life experiences, men and women can complement each other when contribution
to risk reduction and disaster management. Good practices of gender inclusive DRR observed across the globe are evidence of this.\(^{267}\)

\section*{6.7.1 Global progress in promoting gender equality in DRR}

Gender issues have slowly become visible on the global agenda of DRR after decades of marginalization in inter-governmental processes. Such hard women progress is largely due to consistent global advocacy and awareness rising on gender equality in DRR and technical support from the UNDP and UNISDR, in cooperation with other UN agencies, regional organizations and civil societies.

\section*{6.7.2 Promotion of gender equality in disaster risk reduction and management.}

Global advocacy efforts on mainstreaming gender perspectives into DRR began in Ankara, Turkey in November 2001. At that time, the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women, in collaboration with UNISDR, organized an Expert Group Meeting on Environmental Management, and the Mitigation of Natural Disasters; A Gender Perspective. The meeting focused on women’s risk management capacities and skills, which challenged the dominant depiction of women as victims and highlighted their resourcefulness. One recommendation produced was to include gender sensitive environmental management and DRR in the agenda of the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD). In the end, the recommended issues did appear in the WSSD agenda and in the draft Johannesburg plan of Action adopted at the Summit’s conclusion.

In 2004, a workshop on Gender Equality and Disaster Risk Reduction was organized in Honolulu, Hawaii to build on gains in the DRR area and promote further understanding of the subject. Workshop participants emphasized that opportunities for gender fair practices and policies were still too often overlooked in community based risk reduction efforts and government initiatives, and that such gaps had strong

implication for long term outcomes. To support the promotion of gender mainstreaming into DRR, the participants agreed to develop a Gender and Disaster Source book and called upon the Second World Conference on Disaster Reduction (WCDR II) and ongoing work in DRR to consciously integrate gender into policies and practices.268

6.7.3 UN support to mainstreaming gender issues into DRR

All UN agencies have incorporated gender policies and strategies for plans of action on mainstreaming gender into their respective development and humanitarian mandates. Since DRR cuts across all mandated areas of UN agencies, from development to post disaster relief and recovery, this has provided an enabling environment for gender mainstreaming into DRR. Compared with other UN agencies, the UNDP and UNISDR have clear DRR mandates. While UNDP’s DRR mandate focuses more on capacity building and integration of DRR into development planning and programming. Particularly at country level, the UNISDR has a clear mandate for coordinating the implementation of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) and HFA within UN agencies and governments. Following the January 2005 World Conference on Disaster Reduction, both the UNDP and UNISDR have increased their efforts to provide governments with support for mainstreaming gender considerations into the DRR process.

The UNDP gender equality strategy for 2008-2011, based on lessons learned and good practices from its 2006-2007 Gender Action Plan, emphasizes rights based actions for gender equality and underlines operational and institutional priorities in pursuing gender equality. To bring in a specific focus on gender issues in disaster contexts, the organization has adopted The Eight Point Agenda, Practical, and Positive Outcomes for Girls and Women in Crisis in which one point listed is Promote

gender equality in disaster risk reduction; value women’s knowledge and experience.\textsuperscript{269}

UNDP aims to strengthen national capacities in crisis related gender analysis, including gender statistics into disaster risk, impact and need assessments. The UNDP also aims to ensure women’s participation in all dialogues on solution generation for disaster risk management. In the context of the Cluster Working Group on Early Recovery, United Nations Population Fund of disaster and / or conflict.

In early 2007, the UNISDR, for its part launched an initiative on building global partnerships for mainstreaming gender concerns and needs into DRR. The initiative aims to provide a platform for gender activists and different stakeholders to share information, knowledge and experience in addressing gender concern and needs; increase the voice of women and the visibility of women’s roles in and contributions to DRR; and develop policy guidelines on gender and DRR.

With support and guidance from experts from different professional backgrounds during the 2007 & 2008. UNISDR was able to integrate gender perspectives into the documents entitled Words into action containing policy guidelines for national governments on DRR. UNISDR also helped to bring gender perspectives into the government session of the June 2007 Global platform for DRR, which helped to increase governments understanding of gender perspectives and open the door for development policy guidance for governments on gender and DRR.

The HFA, endorsement by 168 national governments at the 2005 World Conference on Disaster Reduction, referred to gender and DRR explicitly and was a large step forward compared to previous DRR policy frameworks, such as the 1994. Yokohama Strategy for a Safer Future, the 1999 International Strategy for disaster Reduction and the Millennium Declaration and Millennium Development Goals

adopted in 2000. The HFA clearly states, “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. In 2006, national governments recognized the neglect of women’s needs, concerns and contributions to DRR at the 61st General Assembly of the United Nations and adopted a resolution concerning the need to speed up the promotion of gender mainstreaming and women’s participation in decision making in DRR initiatives.

Gender issues were addressed at the first session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction held in 2007. The Session summary pointed out that while women play important roles in building a culture of disaster prevention, particularly at the community level, this was not well recognized and so their potential to contribute to DRR was mostly left untapped. The fact that women and girls are disproportionately affected by disasters was also noted. The summary also urges ISDR System partners to undertake awareness raising and action to address gender factors in disaster risk and actively promote women’s leadership and participation in DRR.

In 2008 at the 63rd General Assembly the UN Secretary General reported on the increased promotion of gender mainstreaming of UNISDR. UNISDR’s focus in integrating gender into DRR is three fold; advocating the importance and necessity of gender equality in achieving the overarching goal of the Hyogo Framework; educating and mobilizing both men and women to promote gender equality in disaster risk reduction; and providing guidance and good practices for gender sensitive policies and programmes related to disaster risk reduction. UNISDR also organized modules for capacity building on gender and disaster risk reduction.270

270 Hyogo Framework Action 2005  p. 11
6.7.4 Contribution of UN Agencies at the regional level

Regionally, UNDP initiatives are making progress. In the Latin American region, a group called Risk Management with Gender Equality Learning Community organized their First Regional meeting on Risk Management and Gender Equity in 2007 and conducted a project called knowledge management for the Gender within Disaster Risk Management. This learning community is a joint effort to identify, share, systematize, disseminate and strengthen existing resources and services in Latin America and the Caribbean in order to integrate a gender focus within disaster risk management.

A current UNDP Caribbean Risk Management Initiative project, enhancing gender visibility in Caribbean disaster risk management, uses research from five selected countries in the Caribbean. The results are expected to shed light on the extent that risk management governance mechanisms effectively incorporate gender considerations in these countries. This analysis is expected to help improve risk management mechanisms in the region and to contribute to the achievement of greater equality in the field of risk management, which the project has identified as being fundamental for the survival and well-being of men and women.

UNDP has also provided inputs to capacity development on the subject in South Asia by making policy and practical guidelines on gender and DRR available in local languages. In 2008, United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) initiated the Thematic Group on Gender in Asia that includes DRR as an area of focus. UNISDR provided technical inputs as a member of this group.

6.7.5 Gender consideration in national reports on disaster risk reduction

At national levels, gender perspectives have not yet received adequate attention. From 118 national reports received in 2004, only 19 mentioned gender.

issues. In fact, as reflected in the terminology used, a large majority of the reports reflected poor awareness of gender issues. The country reports also reflect reliance on a disaster response focused disaster management approach which does not factor in gender concerns and differences.

In a nutshell, the national reports submitted by national governments – generally reflected a poor degree of gender mainstreaming at country level. Most governments showed gaps in dealings adequately with gender issues in their policies, legislation and strategies. This was the case in all the regions, especially in those affected by major disasters such as Hurricane Mitch in Central America, the Indian Ocean Tsunami in South Asia and drought and famine in Africa.

In 2007, only eight out of 61 reports received by UNISDR for the first session of the Global platform for Disaster Risk Reduction touched on Gender or Women issues, and did so briefly. These reports were from Brazil, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Togo, Guatemala, Bangladesh, Vietnam and the Philippines. Gender equality and empowerment of women were mentioned in the context of disaster risk reduction and poverty reduction in Sierra Leone. The Togo report underlined women’s vulnerability due to their multiple roles as women, mothers and daughters during disasters. The national reports on disaster risk reduction showed clearly that poor understanding of gender issues in disasters risk reduction is widespread among most countries and it is high time for governments and UN agencies to take actions.

6.8 CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF DESCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN (CEDAW)

The primary treaty protecting the rights of women is the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against women (CEDAW) and the 1999 Optional protocol to the CEDAW. Humanitarian actors should also be aware of other relevant international instruments such as the 1967 Declaration on the elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women and the 1965
Recommendations on Consent to Marriage, Minimum age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages.

The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of CEDAW was adopted in 1979 to reinforce the provisions of existing international instruments aiming to eliminate discrimination against women and achieve gender equality. While CEDAW does not address the gender based violence that is often widespread in crisis situations, the committee that monitor the conventions implementation has addressed the issue in its general recommendation No. 19 and jurisprudence, opening that the definition of discrimination includes gender based violence that is, directed against a women because she is a women or that affects women threads of such acts, coercion and other deprivation of liberty. The International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda have prosecuted crimes of sexual violence, thereby providing legal precedents for protecting women and combating impurity for violations of their rights. The Rome Statute of International Criminal Court (ICC) explicitly recognizes that, under specified circumstances, sexual violence constitutes an International crime. In addition to the human rights treaties, several UN resolutions the world conferences have sought to strengthen the protection and promotion of women’s human rights.

These include 1993 World Conference on Human Right, which affirmed the universality of women’s rights as human rights, stressed the importance of eliminating violence against human and especially recognized violence against women in armed conflict as a violation of basic human rights.²⁷²

²⁷² Statistical data concerning the situation of women The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Considering that statistical information is absolutely necessary in order to understand the real situation of women in each of the States parties to the Convention, Having observed that many of the States parties that present their reports for consideration by the Committee do not provide statistics, responsible for planning national censuses and other social and economic surveys formulate their questionnaires in such a way that data can be disaggregated according to gender, with regard to both absolute numbers and percentages, so that interested users can easily obtain information on the situation of women in the particular sector in which they are interested.
6.8.1 Freedom from Gender Based Discrimination

The CEDAW specifically guards against gender based discrimination. To realize this right, State Parties are required to take actions such as incorporating the principle of gender equality into their constitution and legislation, repealing or amending discriminatory laws, regulations, customs or practices, adopting legislative sanctions to punish acts of discrimination, eliminating gender based discrimination by public authorities, organizations or enterprises. In the context of natural disasters, an important tool for preventing gender based discrimination is the collection of sex aggregated data and ensuring that aid distribution policies and decision making does not focus only on heads of households.

6.8.2 Protection from Violence and Harmful traditional practices

“Women in disaster settings who have inherited assets or been windowed may be more vulnerable to harmful traditional practices, in particular, child forced marriage and associated female genital mutilation and cutting, window “cleansing” ceremonies and dowry related killings. The CEDAW requires that State parties take measure to modify social and cultural patterns of conduct with a view to eliminating customary and other practices that are based on perceived inferiority or stereotypes of women. The declaration on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (1967) holds that states should condemn violence against women and should not invoke any custom, tradition or religious consideration to avoid this obligation.

6.8.3 Protection from Exploitation

Women in disaster settings become vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, particularly widows, unaccompanied women and women living in poverty. The primary dangers are trafficking, forced marriage, including bride sales, and prostitution because of financial necessity, cultural norms or family pressure. There is also evidence that demand from international aid workers has led to increase in prostitution in disaster settings. The CEDAW requires that State Parties adopt
measures to suppress all forms of trafficking, exploitation and prostitution of women.\textsuperscript{273}

\textbf{6.8.4 Right to Participate in Government}

The CEDAW requires that States Parties take steps to guarantee women the right, on equal terms with men, to vote, participate in the formulation of government policy, hold public office and participate in non-government organizations concerned with public and political life. The Convention of Political Rights of Women (1952) contains similar protections.\textsuperscript{274} Although not directly relevant in natural disaster settings, such provisions reiterate the need to facilitate the participation of all persons in election, particularly displaced populations. The provisions also provide a basis for a gender sensitive approach to development planning and reconstruction through the participation of women.

Even where statutory laws protect women’s land rights, these may have little effect in situation where customary law is popularly accepted\textsuperscript{275} and such rules place impediments on women’s enjoyment of land rights”. A further risk is where women cannot benefit from land rights obtained through marriage because they married through a traditional or religious ceremony which is not recognized by the State.\textsuperscript{276}

Second, even where land rights are protected under law, women are generally less able to assert them. Reasons include lack of access to legal institution or legal information, particularly for poor and illiterate women, discriminatory formal and informal legal institutions, and social conditioning such as women being pressured by family or communities to give up their rights of to avoid legal action.\textsuperscript{277}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{273} J Hagen, ‘Fighting Sexual Exploitation and Abuse by UN Peacekeeper’ (2006) Volume XLIII, No.3 UN Chronicle; See also: United Nations Conference Report, High-level conference on Eliminating Sexual Exploitation and Abuse by UN and NGO Personnel, 4 December 2006,
\item \textsuperscript{274} Art. 1-3. See also Art. 4 of the CEDAW.
\item \textsuperscript{276} Women’s Inheritance Rights, p 3 COHRE.
\item \textsuperscript{277} Institutions under www.cohre.org/view_p91.
\end{itemize}
Specific arrangements should be made to enable women, particularly windows, as well as orphaned children, to claim housing, land or property and to acquire housing or land title deeds in their own name. Women and men should be treated equally when documents are any kinds are issued. Women should be issued documentation in their own name as women are less likely to participate in the public sphere in which relief is organized and delivered, they are at risk of having their unique needs overlooked and their rights abrogated. A common way in which this occurs is where land titles are recorded in the names of heads of household only. In such situations, a women’s access to land is dependent on her link to a husband or male relative leaving her without access to credit and at greater risk of her land rights being denied in the event that the rights holder dies. For these reasons it is imperative that women are involved in the planning and implementation of housing, resettlement and restitution programmes.


6.9 INTERNATIONAL AGENCIES WORKING FOR RIGHTS OF WOMEN IN DISASTER SITUATION

- Amnesty International

Amnesty International’s “Stop violence against Women” campaign works in the following areas, women’s empowerment, ending violence against women,
abolition of gender discriminatory laws, promoting the adoption of legislation to protect women’s legal rights, and ensuring access to justice.  

- **Association for Women’s Rights and Development (AWID)**

AWSID is an international membership organization that aims to promote gender equality, sustainable development and women’s human rights. AWSID activities include facilitating debate on women’s issues and building the capacity of organizations working for women’s empowerment and social justice.  

- **Coalition against Trafficking in Women (CATW)**

CATW is NGO that promotes women’s human rights by working internationally to combat sexual exploitation in all its forms. Its programs include addressing gaps in ant trafficking programs and policies, and preventing sex trafficking and sexual exploitation by developing best practices and discouraging demand, prosecution law reform, and advocate. 

- **Gender and Disaster Network**

The Gender and Disaster Network is an educational project focusing on gender relations in disaster contexts. It aims to (i) document and analyze women’s and men’s experiences before, during and after disaster and (ii) foster information sharing and resource building among network members. 

- **Global Fund for Women**

The Global Fund for Women aims to provide long term support for local groups in regions affected by natural disasters through grants that help communities to
rebuild, prevent sexual violence, and ensure that women and children are accorded their full human rights in all stages of development.\textsuperscript{284}

- **Human Rights watch women’s rights division**

  Human Rights Watch works regionally and in thematic areas such as women workers, domestic violence, reproductive rights, sexual rights, sexual violence, women with HIV/AIDS women and armed conflict, international justice, trafficking, women in state custody, refugee and displaced women and women’s status in the family and legal status.\textsuperscript{285}

- **International Association of Women Judges (IAWJ)**

  The IAWJ is an organization of more than 4000 members in 87 Nations those units’ women judges from diverse legal and judicial systems who share a commitment to equal justice and the rule of law. Through its judicial education programmes, the IAWJ works to advance human rights, eliminate discrimination on the basis of gender and make courts accessible to all.\textsuperscript{286}

- **United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNDFW)**

  UNDFW provides financial and technical assistance aimed at fostering women’s empowerment and gender equality. UNDFW works with countries to formulate and implement laws and policies to eliminate gender discrimination and promote gender equality in areas such as land and inheritance rights, decent work for women and ending violence against women. UNDFW also aims to transform institutions to make them more accountable to women’s rights, to strengthen the capacity and voice of women’s rights advocates, and to change harmful and discriminatory practices in society.\textsuperscript{287}

\textsuperscript{284}Available at www.globalfundforwomen.org/cms visited on 31.01.2013 at 05.15 p.m
\textsuperscript{285} Available at www.hrw.org/women visited on 03.01.2013 at 02.00 p.m
\textsuperscript{286} Available at www.iawj.org visited on 08.02.2013 at 02.25 p.m
\textsuperscript{287} Available at www.undfw.org visited on 03.03.2013 at 03.45 p.m
• **United Nations population fund (UNFPA)**

UNFPA supports countries in using population data for policies and programs to reduce poverty and to ensure that every pregnancy is wanted, every birth is safe, every young person is free of HIV/AIDS and every girl and women is treated with dignity and respect. 288

• **Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children**

The Women commission aims to improve the lives and defend the rights of displaced and refugee women and children primer activities include the protection of the displaced, reproductive health, providing opportunities for children, and the protection of asylum seeker.

• **Adventist Development and Relief Agency International (ADRA) :**

Provides immediate disaster relief, supports development programs in community development, construction and agriculture. 289

• **Church World Service (CWS) :**

Provides material aid to refugees and disaster victims supports development programs in agriculture, energy, soil conservation, reforestation, preventive medicine, sanitation and potable water supply. 290

• **Cooperative for assistance and Relief Everywhere (CARE):**

Provides refugee and disaster relief, supports development programs in reforestation, conservation, and agriculture. 291

• **Direct Relief International (DIR):**

Specializes in emergency health care, providing pharmaceuticals, medical supplies, and equipment in famine to disaster affected areas. 292
• Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Response Association (DERA):-
  Assists international community’s disaster preparedness, response and recovery
  serves as a professional association linking disaster relief personnel.\textsuperscript{293}

• League of Red Cross and Red Crescent societies (LICROSS):-
  Coordinate relief activities for disaster victims, provides assistance to refugees,
  helps countries increase their capacity to respond to humanitarian needs of
  victims.\textsuperscript{294}

• Lutheran World Federation (LWF):
  Provides emergency relief for disaster victims supports refugee’s settlement
  programs and a variety of development assistance activities.\textsuperscript{295}

• United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNDFW) :-
  UNDFW financial and technical assistance aimed at fostering women’s
  empowerment and gender equality. It works with countries to formulate and
  implement loss and policies to eliminate gender discrimination and promote
  gender equality in area such as land and inheritance rights, decent work for
  women and ending violence against women. It also aims to transform institutions
  to make them more accountable to women’s rights, to strengthen the capacity and
  the voice of women’s rights advocates, to change harmful and discriminatory
  practices in society.\textsuperscript{296}

• United National Children’s Fund (UNICEF):
  Provides disaster and refugee assistance, particularly to children, supports
  program in sanitation and water supply, promotes training and education in
  improve child health care.

\textsuperscript{292} Available at  www.dir.org visited on 12.04.2013 at 04.15 p.m
\textsuperscript{293} Available at  www.dera.org visited on 03.05.2013 at 05.30 p.m
\textsuperscript{294} Available at  www.licross.org visited on 03.05.2013 at 07.20 p.m
\textsuperscript{295} Available at  www.lwf.org visited on 04.05.2013 at 03.25 p.m
\textsuperscript{296} Available at  www.undfw.org visited on 05.05.2013 at 06.15 p.m
• **United National Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA):**

  Responsible for the coordination of UN assistance in humanitarian crises, provides support for international policy development, advocates humanitarian issues.

• **United States Agency for International Development (USAID):**

  Provides humanitarian, economic, and development assistance to the international community, houses the office of US foreign disaster assistance.

  All UN agencies have incorporated gender policies and strategies for plans of action on mainstreaming gender into their respective development and humanitarian mandates. Since DRR cuts across all mandated areas of UN agencies, from development to post disaster relief and recovery, this has provided an enabling environment for gender mainstreaming into DRR.  

  Compared with other UN agencies, the UNDP and UNISDR have clear DRR mandates. While UNDP’s DRR mandate focuses more on capacity building and integration of DRR into development planning and programming, particularly at country level, the UNISDR has a clear mandate for coordinating the implementation of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) and HFA within UN agencies and governments. Following the January World Conference on Disaster Reduction, both the UNDP and UNISDR have increased their efforts to provide governments with support for mainstreaming gender considerations into the DRR process.  

  The UNDP gender equality strategy for - based on lessons learned and good practices from its 2006-2007 Gender Action Plan, emphasizes rights based actions for

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gender equality and underlines operational and institutional priorities in pursuing gender equality. To bring in a specific focus on gender issues in disaster contexts, the organization has adopted The Eight Point Agenda: Practical, Positive Outcomes for Girls and Women in Crisis in which one point listed is “Promote gender equality in disaster risk reduction: Value women’s knowledge and experience.

In early 2007, the UNISDR, for its part, launched an initiative on building global partnership for mainstreaming gender concerns and needs into DRR. The initiative aims to provide a platform for gender activists and different stakeholders to share information knowledge and experience in addressing gender concerns and needs; increase the voice of women and visibility of women’s roles in and contributions to DRR; and develop policy guidelines on gender and DRR.299

With support and guidance from experts from different professional backgrounds during the 2007 and 2008. UNISDR was able to integrate gender perspectives into the document entitled words into Action containing policy guidelines for national governments on DRR. UNISDR also helped to bring gender perspectives into the government session of the June 2007 Global Platform for DRR, which helped to increase government’s understanding of gender perspectives and open the door for development policy guidance for governments on gender and DRR.

UNISDR has also succeeded in publishing good practices from various stakeholders, including UN agencies, donor agencies, NGOs and Governments, in an effort to highlight two facts; First communities which both men and women are for and second the twenty good practices demonstrates clearly that women, if given equal opportunities, could perform multi functional roles well as participants, managers, decision makers and leaders in the field of DRR. UNISDR is now developing policy guidelines on gender and DRR with supporting documents such as training modules

299 Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the pacific 2009 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.09.II.F.10).
on gender and DRR issues, gender inclusive early warning, and guidelines for gender based risk assessment, gender inclusive indicators for DRR.\textsuperscript{300}

**Promote gender equality and empower women**

Disasters affect men and women differently. Disasters knock backwards progress that women may have made toward greater equality with men, as they are on average more affected. Unequal access to assets, education, knowledge and power deprives women of the resources and capability to protect themselves, their children and their assets from disasters. National planning for disaster relief and recovery often excludes consideration of gender based vulnerability and risks, even though women in developing countries bear the greatest responsibility for managing household resources. Poverty and disasters have a negative impact on education for girls, more than for boys. Disasters like drought often contribute to forcing poor and near poor families to remove their girls from school, so that they can help work for household survival (UNISDR et al, 2009).\textsuperscript{301}

Empowering women in disaster risk reduction consolidates investments in gender equality in development at both the national and local level. Strengthening women’s knowledge and capacity for achieving community disaster resilience will not only reduce development losses, but will also help accelerate the development process, especially in the areas of agriculture, Climate change adaptation, water resource management, and community food security (UNISDR et al, 2009).

Integrate women’s needs and concerns into a broad based community development agenda in disaster prone areas. Governments should do more to promote women’s participation and leadership in disaster risk reduction and the inclusion of

\textsuperscript{300} Id. 88  
\textsuperscript{301} Supra note 58
the perspective and knowledge of women and girls in disaster risk assessment, disaster management planning and preparedness.\textsuperscript{302}

A range of disaster risks must be reduced in order to reduce child mortality, improve maternal health and combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases. Diseases that cause the bulk of child mortality are heavily attributable to malnutrition, lack of clean water and sanitation, and insufficient medical interventions.

**The International Day for Disaster Reduction (IDDR) encourages every citizen and government to take part in building more disaster resilient communities and nations.**

The International Day for Disaster Reduction started in 1989 with the approval by the United Nations General Assembly. The UN General Assembly sees the IDDR as a way to promote a global culture of disaster reduction, including disaster prevention, mitigation and preparedness. Originally celebrated on the second Wednesday of October (resolution 44/236, 2 December (1989), the UN General Assembly decided to designate October 13\textsuperscript{th} as the date to celebrate the IDDR (Resolution 64/200, 21 December 2009).\textsuperscript{303}

**2012: Women and Girls: the Visible Force of Resilience**

“Women and girls are powerful agents of change. They have unique knowledge and skills crucial when addressing or managing disaster risks. They must participate in poverty reduction, climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction that will shape their future and those of their families and communities.


2011: Making Children and Young People Partners for Disaster Risk Reduction.

Repeatedly portrayed as victims of disaster and climate change, children and young people can and should be encouraged to participate in disaster risk reduction and decision making.

2010: My City is getting ready

UNISDR is calling on its partners to play a more active role to protect cities against disasters. Earthquakes in Haiti, Chile and New Zealand; floods and heavy rain falls in Pakistan, Eastern Europe, Mozambique; forest fires in Russia; and volcanic eruptions in Indonesia and Iceland Cities have never been so at risk.

2009: Hospitals safe from Disasters

Beyond their practical importance, hospitals and health facilities have a unique value as symbols of public well being. Making them safe from disasters is essential. UNISDR, WHO and the World Bank, marked the International Day by highlighting the campaign dedicated to Hospitals Safe from Disasters.

2008: Disaster risk reduction is everybody’s business

Governments, civil society, international financial institutions and the private sector are urged to step up implementation of the Hyogo Framework. Disaster risk reduction is everybody’s business. Only by investing in tangible risk reduction measures can we reduce vulnerability and protect development.

2007: Challenging the world’s education authorities

Disaster risk reduction is about stronger building codes, sound land use planning, better early warning systems, environmental management and evacuation plans and above all, education. It is about making communities and individuals aware of their risk to natural hazards and how they can reduce their vulnerability.
2006: Disaster risk reduction begins at school

Disaster risk reduction is about stronger building codes, sound land use planning, better early warning systems, environmental management and evacuation plans and above all, education. It is about making communities and individuals aware of their risk to natural hazards and how they can reduce their vulnerability.

2005: Microfinance and disaster risk reduction

The 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and more recently Hurricane Katrina in the United States and the earthquake in Pakistan and India demonstrated that the poor usually suffer most from disasters. Microcredit is a useful tool for poverty reduction, but its potential to reduce the impact of disaster needs to be further explored.

2004: Today’s disasters for tomorrow’s hazards

After a disaster, government authorities, businesses, community groups and individuals should all ask whether appropriate actions were taken to save life and property. All should work together to improve the chain of information and decision making, so that their communities are better prepared should hazards strike again.

2003: Turning the tide

This theme reminds us, during the International Year of Fresh water that the task is not just to preserve water resources to sustain life, but also to reduce the capacity of water to take life away. More than 90 per cent of all disasters occurring around the world today are related to water.

2002: Sustainable mountain development

No community is immune from the threat of natural disaster, but mountain communities are particularly vulnerable. Poor land use planning, environmental mismanagement, the lack of regulatory mechanisms and other human activities increase the risk that a disaster will occur, and worsen their effects when they do.
2001: Countering Disasters, Targeting Vulnerability

Vulnerability is increasing. While no country is entirely safe, poorer countries in particular lack the capacity to and prevent and prepare for disasters. With the urban population of developing countries having reached more than 1.3 billion, people are forced to inhabit disaster prone areas such as flood plains and deforested lands.

2000: Disaster Prevention, Education and Youth

It is important for future generations, as the leaders of tomorrow, to learn about the long term aspects of environmental protection and to provide them with the necessary early education for a better understanding of both natural hazards and the way to prevent their disastrous impact on societies.

6.10 CONCLUSION

Disasters, seemingly random events that would not pick or choose its victims, do not in fact, affect people equally. After looking at disasters in countries, it has concluded that disasters result in a higher mortality rate of women than men. In result, areas that have been affected by a natural disaster have a lessening in the “gender gap” that occurs from the fact that in most regions of the world women have higher life expectancies than men. Researchers also found that the larger the scale of the natural disaster, as measured by loss of life and loss of life per capita, the higher the rate of female mortality. Conversely they found that female mortality is decreased when women’s socioeconomic status in affected area is high.

Their proposal is that though natural disasters may be created outside the realm of human control, the majority of human lives lost are a direct result of vulnerabilities created by society. In this case, the term vulnerability means “the characteristics of a person or group and their situation influencing their capacity to anticipate, cope with resist and recover from the impact of a natural hazard”. Women
as a group are considered particularly vulnerable in situations of natural disaster for various reasons.

- Biological and psychological differences between the sexes

- Social roles, norms and behaviors

- Discrimination in access to resources and the breakdown of social order

The immediate implications of biological and psychological differences between the sexes point to the physical limitations of the average female, as they are often slower runners, however, a report from Oxfam in 2005 pointed out that in the 2004 tsunami in Indonesia and Southeast Asia, many of the individuals who were able to self rescue were taught how to do so. This may throw out the idea of biological facts as inhibiting women’s survival in a disaster area and point instead to social factors as the men and boys were favored in the teaching of such survival tools over the women and girls. However, there are real implications for women who are pregnant or nursing.

In many areas of the world, particularly those in poorer regions, women are often confined to strict gender roles that may affect their ability to survive in natural disasters. Women’ role as caregivers to children, the elderly, or property, may hinder self rescue. In other cases, dress code may hinder movement, such as the saris that resulted in drowning many women in Bangladesh during a flood. In other cases, the need of approval from a male family member may stop a woman from travelling to safe grounds on her own.

Many of women’s fatalities in the aftermath of a disaster when there is a distinct discrimination in access to resources and breakdown of social order. “The majority of relief efforts are intended for the entire population of a disaster affected area; however, when they rely on existing structures of resource distribution that reflects the patriarchal structure of society, women are marginalized in the access to
relief resources”. What’s more, poor people are the most likely victims of post disaster fatalities. Throughout much of the world, women are much more likely to be poor than men. The negative economic effects of a disaster are more likely to be irreversible for women as well. In linking spatial patterns of disaster risk to human generate vulnerability; geography is uniquely positioned to study the impact of natural disasters on socioeconomic systems and groups of people.

This research can inform future policy makers and relief aid organizations in specifying post disaster response to fit the needs of vulnerable populations, such as women and children.