

a global voice
for women

Soroptimist International



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WOMEN AND GIRLS IN THE AFTERMATH OF NATURAL DISASTER

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AWARENESS

Learn more about this month's focus from an international point of view

Natural disasters are increasing in quantity and intensity. In the light of recent events in Japan, Burma, Australia and New Zealand, SI has decided that our first monthly focus will explore the situation of women and girls in the aftermath of natural disasters. Women and girls experience disasters differently – in their access to resources to manage the immediate impact, their lack of opportunities to economically recover, and in their specific health and safety needs in both the short and long term. As women and girls tend to be more socially vulnerable, they are less equipped to deal with disasters. Raising awareness of how and why women and girls experience disasters differently can greatly improve their ability to survive – read the document below to learn 10 things you should know about women and girls in the aftermath of natural disasters.

[April 2011 Awareness.pdf](#)

Outcomes from the 46th session of CSW, where one of the themes was environmental management and mitigation of natural disasters:

The Commission urges Governments and, as appropriate, also urges the relevant funds and programmes, organizations and the specialized agencies of the United Nations system, the international financial institutions, civil society, including the private sector and NGOs, and other stakeholders, to take the following actions to accelerate implementation of these strategic objectives to address the needs of all women:

- (a) Pursue gender equality and gender-sensitive environmental management and disaster reduction, response and recovery as an integral part of sustainable development;
- (b) Take measures to integrate a gender perspective in the design and implementation of, among other things, environmentally sound and sustainable resource and disaster management mechanisms and establish mechanisms to review such efforts;
- (c) Ensure the full participation of women in sustainable development decision-making and disaster reduction management at all levels;
- (d) Ensure the full enjoyment by women and girls of all human rights - civil, cultural, economic, political and social, including the right to development - including in disaster reduction, response and recovery; in this context, special attention should be given to the prevention and prosecution of gender-based violence;
- (e) Mainstream a gender perspective into ongoing research by, inter alia, the academic sector on the impact of climate change, natural hazards, disasters and related environmental vulnerability, including their root causes, and encourage the application of the results of this research in policies and programmes;
- (f) Collect demographic and socio-economic data and information disaggregated by sex and age, develop national gender-sensitive indicators and analyse gender differences with regard to environmental management, disaster occurrence and associated losses and risks and vulnerability reduction;

- (g) Develop, review and implement, as appropriate, with the involvement and participation of women's groups, gender sensitive laws, policies and programmes, including on land-use and urbanization planning, natural resource and environmental management and integrated water resources management, to provide opportunities to prevent and mitigate damage;
- (h) Encourage, as appropriate, the development and implementation of national building standards that take into account natural hazards so that women, men and their families are not exposed to high risk from disasters;
- (i) Include gender analysis and methods of mapping hazards and vulnerabilities at the design stage of all relevant development programmes and projects in order to improve the effectiveness of disaster risk management, involving women and men equally;
- (j) Ensure women's equal access to information and formal and non-formal education on disaster reduction, including through gender-sensitive early warning systems, and empower women to take related action in a timely and appropriate manner;
- (k) Promote income generating activities and employment opportunities, including through the provision of microcredit and other financial instruments, ensure equal access to resources, in particular land and property ownership, including housing, and take measures to empower women as producers and consumers, in order to enhance the capacity of women to respond to disasters;
- (l) Design and implement gender-sensitive economic relief and recovery projects and ensure equal economic opportunities for women, including both in the formal and non-formal sectors, taking into account the loss of land and property, including housing and other productive and personal assets;
- (m) Make women full and equal partners in the development of safer communities and in determining national or local priorities for disaster reduction and incorporate local and indigenous knowledge, skills and capacities into environmental management and disaster reduction;
- (n) Support capacity-building at all levels aimed at disaster reduction, based on knowledge about women's and men's needs and opportunities;
- (o) Introduce formal and non-formal education and training programmes at all levels, including in the areas of science, technology and economics, with an integrated and gender-sensitive approach to environmentally sound and sustainable resource management and disaster reduction, response and recovery in order to change behaviour and attitudes in rural and urban areas;
- (p) Ensure the implementation of their commitments by all Governments made in Agenda 21 and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly,²⁷ including those in the areas of financial and technical assistance and the transfer of environmentally sound technologies to the developing countries, and ensure that a gender perspective is mainstreamed into all such assistance and transfers;
- (q) Document good practice and lessons-learned, particularly from effective community-based strategies for disaster reduction, response and recovery, which actively involve women as well as men, and widely disseminate this information to all stakeholders;
- (r) Improve and develop physical and mental health programmes, services and social support networks for women who suffer from the effects of natural disasters, including trauma;

(s) Strengthen the capacities of ministries, emergency authorities, practitioners and communities to apply a gender-sensitive approach to environmental management and disaster reduction and the involvement of women professionals and field workers;

(t) Forge constructive partnerships between Governments, international organizations and civil society, including the private sector and NGOs, and other stakeholders in integrated and gender sensitive sustainable development initiatives to reduce environmental risks;

(u) Encourage civil society, including NGOs, to mainstream a gender perspective in the promotion of sustainable development initiatives, including in disaster reduction;

(v) Ensure coordination in the United Nations system, including the full and active participation of funds, programmes and specialized agencies to mainstream a gender perspective in sustainable development including, inter alia, environmental management and disaster reduction activities.

Watch this video produced by the [RAISE Initiative](#) entitled *At Two Fronts: This is the story of reproductive health in emergencies*, offering glimpses into life as it is lived in situations of conflict and natural disaster, and shows why reproductive health care must be included in basic humanitarian response.

<http://www.raiseinitiative.org/latestnews/?p=163>

The Gender and Disaster Network started as an educational project initiated by women and men interested in gender relations in disaster contexts. We are the first web presence to advocate for gender mainstreaming in disaster risk reduction using the World Wide Web.

For up date information about disaster relief efforts, please visit their blog:

<http://blog.gdnonline.org/>

The Gender and Disaster Network and the Natural Hazards Center invite nominations of women and men who should be recognized for their efforts to advance gender-sensitive policy, practice, or research in the areas of disaster risk reduction. Established in 2002, the Mary Fran Myers Award recognizes that vulnerability to disasters and mass emergencies is influenced by social, cultural, and economic structures that marginalize women and girls, and may also expose boys and men to harm. **Deadline for nominations: April 18, 2011.**

Click [here](#) to learn more!

The World Health Organization publishes excellent materials on gender and health in disasters.

"In disaster situations, women and men, boys and girls are affected differently. Available data suggest that there is a pattern of gender differentiation at all levels of the disaster process: exposure to risk, risk perception, preparedness, response, physical impact, psychological impact, recovery and reconstruction..."

Click [here](#) to learn more and to download resources and reports.

ADVOCACY

What is being done to advocate for the needs of women and girls in the aftermath of natural disasters?

Check out the amazing work being done through UNDP to advocate for women and girls:

http://www.undp.org/cpr/we_do/integrating_risk.shtml

Watch a short video clip about working with governments to improve policies to help women and girls: http://undp.edgeboss.net/wmedia/undp/bcpr/davan_women_housing.wvx

Follow the preparations for the The Third Session of the Global Platform and the World Reconstruction Conference. The Third Session builds on previous commitments and the purposeful approach of past Global and Regional Platforms by bringing leaders and opinion makers together with practitioners and experts. Priorities will be set and commitment to reducing disaster risk in our communities will be strengthened.

Click here to keep up to date on this international policy setting conference and monitor the visibility of the needs of women and girls: <http://www.preventionweb.net/globalplatform/2011/>

To address the needs of women and girls in the aftermath of natural disasters, the most successful strategy is to include women's voices in risk management and disaster planning. Many global advocacy campaigns, statements, and efforts are now aiming towards increasing women's participation and decision-making in disaster risk reduction and relief. By including women before disasters strike, we can take steps towards ensuring that their unique needs are met during and after emergencies.

In a recent statement (March 2011), the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Disaster Risk Reduction, Margareta Wahlström, says:

"Disasters affect men and women differently, and so we will continue to lobby for gender-sensitive vulnerability, risk and capacity assessments. Studies show that women's vulnerabilities during and after disasters is linked to their role and status in society, making women and children 14 times more likely to die than men during a disaster.

At the same time, we will work towards increasing women's understanding, knowledge and capacity on disaster risk reduction, and of its links with other development sectors. We will continue to encourage governments to invest in discovering women's needs, so that women are better able to prepare for, and respond to, disasters.

...

Making disaster risk reduction gender sensitive will secure the equal participation of men and women in policy making and policy implementation in disaster risk reduction, making it possible to achieve disaster-resilient nations and communities. And, as the frequency and impact of climate-related disasters increases, UNISDR is committed to building a culture of prevention that is founded on the specific needs, voices, roles, and potential of women, men, boys, and girls.”

Since the early 1990s, the Huairou Commission and GROOTS International member groups have experienced major disasters including two major earthquakes in India (1993 and 2001), Hurricane Mitch in Honduras (1999), Marmara Earthquake in Turkey (1999), multiple hurricanes affecting Jamaica (Hurricanes Ivan 2004, Dennis 2005, Dean 2007 and Gustav 2008), Bam Earthquake in Iran (2004), and The Indian Ocean Tsunami (2004). Women found that they were facing similar problems in post disaster relief and recovery processes-there was a need for women to be leaders in planning and monitoring processes and programs.

They have developed a tool to help advocate for the needs and perspectives of the women and girls most adversely affected by natural disasters. This tool is an excellent resource for developing local advocacy platforms and lobbying efforts (page 7 in particular):

http://www.huairou.org/sites/default/files/UnderstandingResilienceTool_GrootsInternational_0.pdf

[ACTION](#)

Take action to transform the lives of women and girls around the world.

Use the 2010 Inter-agency Field Manual on Reproductive Health in Humanitarian Settings developed by the Interagency Working Group on Reproductive Health in Crisis to inform your work in this important area for women and girls in the aftermath of disasters:

http://www.iawg.net/resources/field_manual.html#download

Many Soroptimists are already deeply involved in disaster relief, addressing the particular needs of women and girls - read about some of the recent actions taken here. This article originally appeared in the March 2011 issue of TIS, SI's quarterly magazine.

[April 2011 Action.pdf](#)

USEFUL LINKS

If you want to learn more, here is the place to start!

[UNDP Disaster Risk Recovery and Reduction](#)

UNDP works with its partners on DRR and recovery in more than 100 countries with annual expenditures of over US\$ 150 million promoting the importance of investing in DRR and effective disaster recovery in achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

[Global Platform for Disaster Reduction](#)

The Global Platform for Disaster Reduction was established in 2007 as a biennial forum for information exchange, discussion of latest development and knowledge and partnership building across sectors, with the goal to improve implementation of disaster risk reduction through better communication and coordination amongst stakeholders. The Global Platform is managed by the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction

[Gender and Disaster Network](#)

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[WHO Gender and Health in Disasters](#)

In disaster situations, women and men, boys and girls are affected differently. Available data suggest that there is a pattern of gender differentiation at all levels of the disaster process: exposure to risk, risk perception, preparedness, response, physical impact, psychological impact, recovery and reconstruction. WHO is committed to ensuring that gender considerations are adequately addressed in all of its relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction activities.

[Inter-Agency Working Group on Reproductive Health in Crises](#)

The Inter-agency Working Group (IAWG) on Reproductive Health in Crises was formed in 1995 to promote access to quality reproductive health care for refugee women and others affected by humanitarian emergencies. It originally comprised more than 30 groups, including United Nations (UN) agencies, universities and governmental and nongovernmental organizations, and was led by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the UN Population Fund (UNFPA).

[Understanding Disaster Resilience](#)

Grassroots Women's Strategies for Building Disaster Resilience

In two regions – Latin America and the Caribbean and Asia, GROOTS International and the Huairou Commission have facilitated conversations with grassroots women at different learning forums in order to collectively develop a shared understanding of resilience.

RAISE Initiative

Access to reproductive health care is a basic human right. Yet integrated and fully comprehensive reproductive health services are not the norm in most emergency settings. People are displaced from their homes for many reasons, and an overwhelming number of preventable deaths and illnesses related to reproductive health affect populations in crisis.

International Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction

The International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) is a strategic framework, adopted by United Nations Member States in 2000, aiming to guide and coordinate the efforts of a wide range of partners to achieve substantive reduction in disaster losses and build resilient nations and communities as an essential condition for sustainable development.

Asian Disaster Reduction Centre

The Asian Disaster Reduction Center was established in Kobe, Hyogo prefecture, in 1998, with mission to enhance disaster resilience of the member countries, to build safe communities, and to create a society where sustainable development is possible. The Center works to build disaster resilient communities and to establish networks among countries through many programs including personnel exchanges in this field.