PROMOTING GENDER SENSITIVITY:
DISASTER RISK REDUCTION IN PAKISTAN

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Abstract

Gender sensitization is a theory that a maximum number of policy analysts discover easy to implement, but very few perform well. The same can be said about disaster risk reduction. When these two concerns are put together to mainstream gender into disaster risk reduction (DRR), concerned organizations and experts find gaps in planning and implementation of policies. This is not because the job is integrally challenging; rather, there is not adequate practical guidance and pragmatic information. This paper aims to increase awareness about gender issues in disaster risk reduction, to improve government capability to address gender problems in DRR and to encourage Pakistan’s government to incorporate gender perception into DRR legislatures, strategies and plans for sustainable development. The importance of the Beijing Agenda for global action on gender sensitive DRR and the Manila Declaration for Global Action on gender in climate change and DRR have been highlighted, with the help of information from other developing countries, to develop a road map for Pakistan. Capacity development and
gender-aware knowledge products are the two main areas with the help of which concerns regarding gender sensitivity can be addressed in disaster preparedness, recovery and rehabilitation.

Keywords

Gender sensitization, disaster, risk reduction, capacity-development

Introduction

Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) involves minimizing the threat associated with disaster exposure to risks, reducing the vulnerability of society and its assets, sensible land and environment management, proper preparation, and mitigation practices for disasters and risks. DRR processes disaster preparedness through planning, management, and mitigation (Denkelman 2012). The occurrence of disasters in different places all over the world can be attributed to developmental retardation in such areas. Therefore, a greater need requires lessening the impact of disasters in order to promote development in disaster-prone regions. However, it is generally understood that when men and women are guaranteed equal opportunities, entitlements and rights in society, there is a greater likelihood of increasing resilience to disaster. Evidence indicates that gender inequality is the most significant determinant of who is affected most by disasters (Davorn 2013). For instance, following the 2007–2008 world economic crisis, households headed by women were 1.6 times more prone to food insecurity as compared to male-headed homesteads. Therefore, addressing existing gender inequality can bring about a positive result while attempting to increase resilience to disastrous events (Enarson et. al., 2009). Indeed, when both men and women receive DRR training, they are enabled to share the roles of leadership and knowledge in the face of disastrous events, thereby limiting a disaster's impact and strength. Other initiatives that could be applied to promote gender equality in addressing disasters, include changing gender roles and challenging power imbalances by improving the position of women in society.

Since women are affected most by disasters as a result of existing socio-economic, traditional practices and cultural beliefs, females have higher chances of suffering disproportionately from the occurrence of disasters. Often, disasters and their after-effects cause deaths, increased gender-based violence and loss of reproductive assets. In most cases, women are the victims of less access to necessary disaster management skills and resources associated with prevention of losses and preparedness to address natural calamities and disasters (Sweetman 2005). Moreover, traditionally rooted gender bias prevents not only recognition of women’s efforts to address disasters, but women’s harrowing experiences
mostly remain unnoticed and unrecognised. This lack of recognition has always demoralized women; hence, reportedly, the role of women in reducing risks during disaster occurrences is scantily documented globally.

Following low gender equality in Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) all over the world, this paper attempts to find out some measures that can be applied by the Government of Pakistan to promote gender-sensitive resilience in the country.

Objectives of the Research

1. To raise awareness concerning inherent gender issues and requirements for a disaster risk reduction process.
2. To create strategies that can be implemented by the Pakistani government while addressing gender-related challenges during formulation of policies to reduce risks resulting from disasters.
3. To campaign for equal gender roles in reducing risks resulting from disasters through development of appropriate programmes in Pakistan.

Disaster Risk Reduction in Pakistan

Due to geo-physical risks, extreme climatic conditions and high degrees of vulnerability, Pakistan is a disaster-prone region. Hydro-meteorological, biological and geo-physical hazards such as cyclones, avalanches, storms, floods, droughts, glacial lake outburst floods (GLOF), landslides, earthquakes, epidemics and tsunamis are threats for the Pakistani nation. Some of these dangers (e.g. landslides, floods) are mainly recurrent and occur annually, whereas other risks such as tsunamis and earthquakes are infrequent but potentially extremely damaging. In addition to natural hazards, man-made disasters also impact the Pakistani people, environment and economy. They incorporate transport and industrial catastrophes including nuclear hazards, oil spills, civil unrest, forest and urban fires.

Pakistan is experiencing speedy changes as it shifts from a primarily rural and agricultural economy to an industrialized, urban and service-based economy. People who have been residing in risk-prone zones for ages, often have tools that let them identify and lessen the dangers that surround them. However, as communities travel or migrate within the country, the number of poor people living in regions exposed to risks increases; these migrants have little awareness about threats. An increasing rate of population growth further worsens the situation and leads to ecologically harmful activities, such as uncontrolled overgrazing or logging that may increase and vary the impact of existing hazards. Climate change intimidates by changing monsoon and rain patterns and is
anticipated to lead to more drought and flooding incidents. Fast urbanization with less consideration to spatial planning and building standards exposes greater numbers of people to extremely destructive events such as earthquakes and cyclones.

The 2005 earthquake and regular floods have exposed the vulnerability of the Pakistani nation and economy to disasters. Losses and damage have been huge but could have been greatly reduced if disaster risk reduction practices had been integrated into social, physical and economic development. The 2005 earthquake revealed the fact that disasters are not entirely natural; they are closely connected to human expertise, acts or failures. The 2005 earthquake gave a wake-up call to shift from a crisis response model towards prevention, mitigation and preparedness.

The National DRR Policy delivers a complete guiding agenda for addressing increased levels of disaster risk threatening Pakistani communities. It covers both man-made and natural hazards. The policy pursues priority action areas to improve already existing vulnerability to hazards and to strengthen resilience. The policy assists as a guiding framework both for DRR and related development strategies and plans. It is a comprehensive policy that integrates gender aspects too, but at the implementation level, great number discrepancies can be observed.

**Literature Review**

Following the International Conference on Gender and Disaster Reduction (ICGDR), which took place in April 2009 in China, the participant members comprising forty-three states shared knowledge and expertise concerning Disaster Risk Reduction. This summit was held to commemorate the achievements made by most of the members in promoting gender equality in their DRR and other disaster management initiatives. During this summit, several recommendations, which were targeted towards increasing gender sensitivity in DRR initiatives were made. Some of the proposals included intensification of gender study and mainstreaming commitment politically, analysis and improvement of national plans, related laws, policies, strategies and finances and taking prompt actions to ensure gender mainstreaming (Roeth 2009). Moreover, proposals advocated fostering a connection between risk reduction in unlikely events and climatic concerns in perspective of gender. Another proposal involved gathering relevant information on disaster impacts, assessing vulnerability regarding gender, and developing indicators to evaluate and analyse the progress of gender programmes (Sweetman 2005). Furthermore, members resolved to increase public awareness regarding gender-sensitive vulnerabilities and capacities, as well as gender-specific needs and concerns in the pre-disaster phase, and to encourage research institutes to carry out studies aimed at evaluating the advantages and disadvantages of gender-sensitivity strategies. The summit also called for the development, promotion, and
maintenance of equal opportunities regarding participation of both genders in the synchronization of preparation towards disasters, humanitarian outreach, and rehabilitation by initiating proper mechanisms such as capacity building.

During the third Global Congress of Women in Politics & Governance (GCWPG), which was organized in Manila between 19-22 October, 2008, the theme was gender mainstreaming in reducing risks during disasters and climate change. This Congress enabled decision-makers to frame gender-responsive programmes by linking them to the impacts of climate change and risk reduction practices during disasters. Parliamentarians, representatives of women and environmental agencies, and donor organizations were its participants. The Declaration presented some guidelines for DRR policy makers and implementers. First, it stated that both men and women are dynamic representatives of revolution, holders of precious information and expertise, which can be used by influential leaders globally to mitigate climate change and plan for the reduction of risk during disaster. Second, developed countries have a greater responsibility to deal with climate change taking into account the lack of knowledge by both genders regarding climate change and DRR in most countries (Field, et al., 2012). Third, women should be empowered as they constitute a significant segment of underprivileged individuals in the world who experience inadequate access to resources such as expertise, facilities, property rights, credit and insurance schemes, and decision-making capability (Roeth 2009). Fourth, it predicted an increase in the current configurations of gender inequalities due to climate change, and therefore it resolved that addressing this concern is the most critical task of the modern age. Lastly, the lack of addressing gender issues in international treaties regarding climate change at national, local, and global levels, must be dealt with through commitments and legitimately binding mechanisms on gender equality.

UNDP collaboration with the National Crisis Management Centre (CMC) in Macedonia, a republic where earthquakes and floods present severe threats, led to the inclusion of gender concerns in all CMC actions, which is a vital part of this partnership. Additionally, the launching of a Geographic Information System (GIS) programme enabled the collection of gender-related data, which was essential in understanding the impact of disaster on women (National Disaster Management Authority, 2013). Training on the protection of women is provided to the Macedonian Red Cross. Consequently, this organization is capable of uploading the gender software application for e-learning. Due to the effective incorporation of gender concerns into crisis management, the plan has also worked as a facilitator for the formation of policies, tactics, and documents. The National Platform on Disaster Risk Reduction has initiated working configurations for gender problems in case of calamities and misfortunes. UNDP and CMC staff are cooperating to articulate a gender-responsive national contingency plan.
Even though the collaborative efforts of UNDP and CMC have been fruitful in facilitating policy-making in the context of disaster risk reduction by highlighting special needs of both genders and providing data necessary for assessments required for formulation of practical plans (Roeth 2009), numerous challenges are faced by Macedonia in the process of gender mainstreaming in DRR practices such as institutional, legal, capacity and operational difficulties. Thus far, there are some restrictions due to institutional overlapping of competencies, lack of coordination & cooperation. Disaster preparedness relies on the level of operational and technical capabilities (Shelat 2014). The Early Warning System is obsolete and needs to be updated. Practices, evaluations, situations, policies, and processes need to be detached to avoid the institutional overlapping and incoherent decision making. Resources for emergency preparedness, response, and recovery for people, especially for women, are often dispersed and unsatisfactory.

As a result of regular famines and water shortages in Sri Lanka, drought risk reduction, water management for agriculture, land management and biodiversity were recommended as the main strategies of reducing the current natural disasters in the country. Males and females both functioned according to plan development, determining the techniques by which every home would add and get an advantage. Both segments of society participated in ascertaining the crops and plants and creating strategies for land use, thus enhancing resistance to scarcity, safeguarding necessities and relieving anxieties of both genders (National Disaster Management Authority 2013). Women, through their association with participatory dialogues, improved their power as a community group, functioning hand in hand with men, to implement methods that decrease female weakness (Pelling 2012).

Due to the yearly inundations in Takeo province, situated along the southern Cambodia-Vietnam border, Oxfam collaborated with partner Chamroeun Cheat Khmer (CCK) to design the Takeo Flood Mitigation Program in villages throughout the province. Gender impartiality and women's headship was the principal aim of the Takeo Flood Mitigation Program. This plan consisted of channelling a systematic and comprehensive gender study and incorporated particular practices to encourage women's governance and gender fairness. An extensive series of discussions with women resulted in prospects for them to improve their community management ability and skills (Field e al. 2012). An environment which allowed women leaders to meet, share their understandings and support each other was created. The plan also functioned with men who constructed their opinions regarding gender equality and offered support for female involvement. By using this technique, women's issues were well addressed (Turnbull 2013).
The people also formed Village Committees for Disaster Management (VCDMs). These committees generally comprised five associates, of whom three members had to be women. The chairperson had to be a woman, whereas the second-in-command position is allocated to a male. Under normal conditions, the VCDMs meet every month, whereas in flood conditions they are expected to meet at least two times a month. Oxfam coordinated with CCK to support the public in formulating VCDM's strategies and core guidelines, and also deliver a framework to committee affiliates for the efficacy of the VCDMs. Furthermore, this plan improved the capacity of the public to deal in a better way with calamities through strengthening house structures as a protective measure from storms and torrents, recognizing and building safe zones, and raising the foundations of houses (Morris 2014).

Given existing geographical circumstances in Nepal, the Nepal Red Cross Society (NRCS) implemented the "Kathmandu Valley Earthquake Preparedness Initiative" (KVEPI) programme in the Valley. The programme's emphasis was to make disaster preparedness stronger and responsible for the people at the ward level with a unique focus on women’s involvement at all stages. To assess the influence of women's participation on the plan and surveys, focus group consultations, secondary data examination and discussions among both community fellows and experts in the programme areas were conducted. Both males and females contributed to the group debates. The input of women of several age groups and from different cultural circumstances made the deliberations more stable and productive. It was observed that the practice of using female organizers managed to obtain better involvement by women during the dialogues and focus group consultations.

The Red Cross training improved women's awareness of disaster preparedness and their knowledge of earthquake dangers and mitigation methods. They were encouraged to ascertain both the capabilities and weaknesses of their societies. The training enhanced the women's self-confidence and assured them that they could organize their communities in earthquake scenarios (Turnbull 2013). As an outcome of the training, women assembled to create "mothers' clubs" in several communities. They see each other at regular meetings to deliberate about public concerns such as disaster vigilance, the establishment of revolving crisis funds (similar to micro-credit) and monthly savings. These were essential practices to ensure the program's sustainability and enhance societal cohesion and public ownership.

As a result of an extended period of famine in summertime, occasionally massive floods and avalanches are experienced in wintertime at Beni Khedache in Tunisia. A comprehensive sustainable environmental resource management plan which involved several practices meant to deal with desertification, water scarcity, soil erosion was established, and these initiatives were centred on traditional knowledge. The involvement of women was primarily significant for finding local understanding to decrease
desertification. Practices comprised rainwater harvesting, improving the region's biodiversity, innovative agricultural methods, and plant cover. The plan operated to reduce threats of hazards expected to be intensified by climate change, such as landslides and desertification initiated by extreme weather conditions. The program worked to lessen the strain on water sources through integrating local awareness of water administration and eliminating hurdles to better soil management (Smerdon 2013). Women were the key implementers of most of the actions. Gender perspectives were incorporated through discussion with women and the acknowledgment of their local expertise to combat desertification. The community level execution of schemes involved both men and women and highlighted the significance of women's contributions.

Findings

1. Risk vulnerability is determined by environmental factors resulting from geographic location, which requires a solution that targets particular factors instead of generalizations.
2. Empowering women has a high potential to improve society's adaptation to disaster risk.
3. The systematic application of a gender lens in society can be efficiently applied in the improvement of gender sensitivity in disaster risk reduction.
4. If governments can introduce policies which are directed towards addressing gender mainstreaming issues in society, women will be able to play significant roles for Disaster Risk Reduction. In Pakistan, policies exist but challenges are faced during implementation of these policies.
5. Involving the participation of all gender groups in decision-making and the empowerment process is essential.
6. Women should be included in Disaster Risk Reduction training as it will increase their knowledge regarding disaster management techniques and also boost their self-confidence.
7. Assessments should be done on gender-sensitive vulnerability and developing indicators to evaluate and analyse the progress of disaster risk-reduction initiatives.
8. It is crucial to address the perception and gender needs of each group regarding risk-reduction during disasters.

Reducing risk vulnerability during disasters resulting from environmental factors, facilitated by geographic location

The environmental conditions of a particular geographic location play a significant role in determining the level of vulnerability to risk during disaster occurrence and climate change. It is implied that different groups have different levels of vulnerability depending
on their age, gender health, social status, disability, and other common sociocultural characteristics (Morris 2007). Natural disasters tend to be disproportionately harsh on the vulnerable groups of individuals, with the majority being women. Women are the most affected among the vulnerable groups because they are the poorest people in the society, are less educated and are excluded from decision-making in the community, family and political landscape. As a result of the stated economic and social inequalities in a community, women are equipped with meagre means and fewer assets for tackling the adverse effects of natural disasters. Even though natural disasters pose a more significant threat to the entire society, they always have a harsher impact on women than men, a fact attributed to differences in the ability to cope with such circumstances. For instance, Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar in 2008 resulted in a 61 percent death of women. Moreover, about 70 percent of the casualties in the 2004 Tsunami in the Indian Ocean, and 91% in the 1991 Bangladesh Cyclone, were women (Morris 2007).

To improve gender sensitivity in disaster risk-reduction, women, who are considered to be the more vulnerable gender, should be adequately equipped so that they are able to take necessary actions during disasters. Some of the strategies that can be implemented to increase gender sensitivity in reduction of vulnerability to disaster risks, include growing women's education on disaster management and involving them in all decision making.

**Empowering women to improve their adaptation to the disaster risk**

Empowering women has a high potential to improve society's adaptation to disaster risk. In most cases, the vulnerability of women has always been ignored, which has made it difficult to obtain favourable outcomes from planned RDD measures. Women have collective and individual experience and knowledge in the management of natural resources at the community level, and household experiences through which they can acquire skills that are beneficial for adapting to disaster efforts. For instance, women in the States of Micronesia are reported to have been well equipped with island hydrology knowledge, which was useful in creating a water source for their families. To enhance gender sensitivity in reduction of risks during disasters in Pakistan, the government should seek means of empowering women in society as empowered women are more resilient.

**The government should introduce policies that are directed towards addressing gender mainstreaming issues in society**

Even though women are the most significant percentage in the world regarding population, they make up the lowest contribution in terms of economic activity. The existing government policies, programs, and initiatives affect men and women differently, which
has made it difficult to realize a reduction in the rate of risks associated with national disasters. The government should address the gender gaps in policies and other approaches to gender mainstreaming that will, in turn, strengthen formulation of inclusive policies for both women and men to address improvement in approaches aimed at reducing risk during disaster occurrence (Shaw, 2014). Some approaches to gender mainstreaming policies include adding gender tools and lens in assessing the impact of formulated policies, gender inequity, regulations that limit women's economic engagement, gender budgeting and uplifting the quality of gender support assessments.

**Systematic application of gender lens to improve gender sensitivity in the disaster risk reduction**

Routine use of a gender lens in policy formulation should be made an integral part in strengthening process policy formulation, impact, and quality of policies by referring to their consistency, transparency, and inclusiveness. Through a systematic approach, all the effects of newly introduced policies are assessed before and after they have been introduced to the targeted groups such as women and the disabled. Gender impact assessment (GIA) is another strategy that can be applied to enhance the systematic implementation of gender mainstreaming in disaster risk reduction.

GIA involves the assessment of policies from a gender perspective. The stages at which the GIA method is applied are dependent on nature and the context in which the policy is applied. The government of Pakistan should, therefore, apply systematic use of a gender lens to improve gender sensitivity in disaster risk reduction.

**The inclusion of women in disaster risk reduction trainings**

Allowing women to be part of the DRR training will increase women's awareness of disaster preparation and knowledge concerning catastrophe elimination methods. During the training, women are encouraged to assess their weaknesses and potential. The training of women on the RDD measures increases the women's confidence and allows them to take active roles in organizing their communities during natural disasters (Howley 2014). The training of women also enables the women to become trainers of other women and this results in the creation of clubs where most women get enlightened. Through the education of women on matters of Disaster Risk Reduction, enlightened women begin to take active roles in deliberations about public concerns, the creation of the public funds and disaster vigilance. To increase gender sensitivity in the Disaster Risk Reduction, the Pakistani government should, therefore, include women in the RDD training to boost their confidence in the disaster response preparedness.
Addressing the gender needs and perception of each individual concerning the
disaster risk reduction

Both men and Women have their own specific needs which consist of practical needs such
as availing food for their families and employees, and strategic needs which entail getting
access to resource equality in decision making, such as involvement in the DRR
committees and elimination of discrimination. However, men and women have inherent
differences regarding the characteristics that determine their resilience to catastrophic
events. Informal networks between men and women can be utilized in making necessary
preparations for how to respond to disasters.

Since the needs for both genders are related to their accurate perceptions of risks,
enhancement of disaster preparations can offer an essential platform whereby the strategic
needs of the women can be handled to elevate their positions in the community and in
households. For example, most household members experience and perceive risk as
associated with their gender responsibilities (Pelling 2012).

In most cases, women are seen struggling with kitchen duties, and this makes food
shortages burden them. Similarly, it is common to find different members in the same
household with separate needs for coping with risks. For this reason, it is necessary that
each family should be carefully evaluated to enable the identification of coping strategies
and risk factors of every individual in case of disasters. To enhance its ability as a game
changer in reducing risk during disaster, the government of Pakistan should, therefore,
address the gender needs and perceptions of each citizen.

Giving equal access and control over goods, services, information, and productive
resources across the gender groups

To enhance efficient preparation to counter impacts of natural hazards, in order to
minimize the risks of disasters, it is imperative that both genders should be allowed to
decide on what they would do and how they intend to carry out their activities. This
involvement in planning implies that each person should be allowed to access productive
resources, such as loans and lands, whenever they need them. By according equal access to
resources such as loans, goods, services, and information necessary for anticipation of risks,
individuals will be able to conceptualize and apply possible changes to improve their
resilience, information and services (Howley 2014). The denial of equal access to services
like agricultural advisories, training, and other goods to both genders are some of the
factors that hamper the rate of disaster risk reduction, as males and females are not equally
equipped to counter such events. To improve gender sensitivity in Pakistan on the
reduction of risk during disaster, proper mechanism should be provided to enhance equal
control and access to goods, services, productive resources, and information to both males and females in the country.

**Involving the participation of all gender groups in the decision-making and empowerment process**

Families and communities are always engaged in the process of making complex decisions to help in the attainment of their income, health, food security and other needs. The type of arrangements that are formed within and outside families are always associated with levels of power and responsibility. Since it is not logical to assume that community leaders are endowed with the experience and knowledge of all groups in the community, the decision-making process in public should, therefore, be made in such a way that resilience decisions involve as many people as possible (Morris 2007).

Putting up DRR efforts that teach knowledge from both men and women is not likely to promote any existing inequality in society because it is a representation that does not focus only on the most influential people in the community. As an effort aimed at raising gender sensitivity in reducing risk during disasters, the Pakistani government should involve the participation of all gender groups.

**Conclusion**

The Pakistan National Disaster Management Plan was formulated in 2012 and it presents ways to help vulnerable peoples such as women and marginalized people, including the elderly and the disabled, and also explains the roles of national, provincial and local governments and residents for each type of disaster. When disaster occurs, it affects all genders, but it creates different impacts for males and females. In this regard, the Pakistan national climate change policy 2013 also highlights initiatives to manage damage by disasters and to make sure that children and women gain specific attention in evacuation plans (NDMA 2013). We are very good at the policy formulation stage but face numerous challenges during the implementation phase of these policies, and same is the case with gender mainstreaming in DRR.

The Pakistani government should address various issues regarding gender that have inhibited all efforts targeted towards improvement of disaster resilience. In this way, the government will be able to enhance gender sensitivity in reducing risks resulting from disasters in the country. The study has discovered some strategies that can be applied to increase gender sensitivity in disaster risk reduction. Some of the approaches that the Pakistani government should incorporate include involving women in training and promoting the participation of men and women in the decision-making and empowerment
process. Additionally, the government should provide equal access and control over goods, services, information and productive resources across the gender divide. Moreover, it should ensure the involvement of all gender groups in the decision-making and empowerment process by addressing the gender needs and perceptions of each concerning disaster risk reduction. Another useful strategy would be provision of the systematic application of a gender lens to improve gender sensitivity in disaster risk reduction. The government should introduce policies which are directed towards addressing gender mainstreaming issues in society and should also empower women to improve their adaptation to disaster risk. If all these measures of increasing gender sensitivity in the community can be adopted by the government of Pakistan, then the country will realize a significant improvement in risk mitigation and management during disasters.

Bibliography


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