



Empowering Women for Disaster Resilient: An Urgent Need

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Abstract

Disasters have had an impact on the lives of women all around the world. Generally women are looked at in disasters only as victims despite of the fact that the majority of victims in disasters are women and children. The central role of women in facing the aftermath of disasters is totally neglected. Disasters have continued to exact a heavy toll and, as a result, the well-being and safety of persons, communities and countries as a whole have been affected. Over 700 thousand people have lost their lives, over 1.4 million have been injured and approximately 23 million have been made homeless as a result of disasters. Overall, more than 1.5 billion people have been affected by disasters in various ways, with women, children and people in vulnerable situations disproportionately affected. The total economic loss was more than \$1.3 trillion. i It has been observed that more than half of the victims in past disasters were women and they are not having any technical knowledge about disaster occurrence in general. ii Empowering women in planning, and decision making related to strategies for the Disaster Management is still needed. This Paper suggests social inclusion of women by way of increasing capacity building and reducing vulnerability level for the better recovery, relief and rehabilitation aftermath of disasters.

Keywords: Women, Disasters, Crisis, Vulnerability, Laws, Policies, India

1. INTRODUCTION

Hazards do not discriminate based on human social conditions, but human responses to disasters often do. Existing socio-economic conditions mean that disasters can lead to different outcomes for demographically similar communities, where the most vulnerable groups also suffer disproportionately on multiple counts compared to others. The economically weaker and socially marginalized sections, women, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and minorities tend to suffer more during disasters.ⁱⁱⁱ Generally women have been looked at disasters as victims rather than as strong building character towards effective disaster management. Women have been more vulnerable to disasters due to various socio economic conditions. Role played by women in pre- post disasters have been totally neglected. Since India is vulnerable to disasters -more than 58.6 per cent of the landmass is prone to earthquakes of moderate to very high intensity; over 40 million hectares (12%) of its land is prone to floods and river erosion; close to 5,700 kms, out of the 7,516 kms long coastline is prone to cyclones and tsunamis; 68% of its cultivable area is vulnerable to droughts; and, its hilly areas are at risk from landslides and avalanches. Moreover, India is also vulnerable to Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) emergencies and other man-made disasters.^{iv} During the past major disasters it has been observed that Women have been more affected due to various factors such as poverty, low literacy level, lack of awareness, physical fitness etc.



2. LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK REGARDING DISASTER & WOMEN

Pre existing vulnerability, structural defect and gender inequality increases the effect of disaster upon women. Vulnerability and potentiality of disasters puts burden upon the enforcement agencies to make the provision for consideration of women in disaster management. Following act, guidelines, policies or scheme have been formulated by central government and National Disaster Management Authority in different segment whereby women centric concern has been focussed for giving due care and basic facilities to women, children and aged people.

A. DISASTER MANAGEMENT ACT, 2005

Disaster Management Act has been centrally enacted for providing effective management of disasters and for the matters connected therewith. However there is no specific provision in the act relating to inclusion of women in the every phase of disaster management cycle for effective management of disaster.

B. NATIONAL DISASTER MANAGEMENT PLAN 2019

The Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, enunciated a Ten-Point Agenda in his inaugural speech at the Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction 2016, held in New Delhi during November, 2016 (AMCDRR), which has also been incorporated in the National Disaster Management Plan, 2019. Where the 3rd Agenda is upon: "Women's leadership and their greater involvement should be central to disaster risk management" - Which speaks about that it is necessary to encourage greater involvement and leadership of women in disaster risk management. Women are disproportionately affected by disasters. They also have unique strengths and insights. India must train a large number of women volunteers to support special needs of women affected by disasters. There is also need for women engineers, masons and building artisans to participate in post-disaster reconstruction and promote women self-help groups which can assist in livelihood recovery. According to the plan it seems very necessarily to inculcate the steps of inclusion of women in each and every stage for efficient pre and post disaster management.

C. NDMA- NATIONAL LANDSLIDES RISK MANAGEMENT STRATEGY, 2019

India is vulnerable to different types of landslides which cause significant destruction in terms of loss of lives and property. As per GSI, about 0.42 million km covering nearly 12.6% of land area of our country is prone to landslide hazards. This guidelines specify about gaps in capacity building at professional level wherein educating local women as key stakeholders needs to be promoted, as women and children tend to be victims of hazards, but can also be more effective change-makers in the community. The village training level programmes on landslide DRR shall have some well defined tasks in the form of mock drills and simulation exercises (in the course module) to be executed by the trainees in separate categories of (a) Men, (b) women, (c) Children (d) Old aged persons etc. The winners should be given some financial remuneration.

D. NATIONAL GUIDELINES ON TEMPORARY SHELTERS FOR DISASTER - AFFECTED FAMILIES, 2019

NDMA on these guidelines focuses that it can assist states in managing post disaster shelter needs effectively. It has been stated that the most vulnerable community members tend to be invisible and unable to access support. Therefore, targeted attention should ensure their inclusion. No one should be left behind. Where Vulnerable people such as single women, old aged, physically challenged, terminally ill, illiterate, extremely poor, minorities and SC/STs, etc. may require additional support and to facilitate recovery and rehabilitation.

E. NDMA GUIDELINES ON MINIMUM STANDARD OF RELIEF, 2016

NDMA guidelines on this specify about relief and rehabilitation in post disaster scenario wherein it has been emphasized that special provision should be provided to widows and orphans. It has been given due importance in respect of medical cover to the affected people and necessary basic arrangement to pregnant women shall be made by local administration for the safe delivery.

F. NDMA GUIDELINES ON DRAUGHT MANAGEMENT, 2010

NDMA guidelines on this specify about how the draught management should effectively carried out wherein community participation plays an effective role. Community mobilization contributes substantially to social motivation and the effectiveness of relief operations. Women's Self-Help Groups (SHGs) play an important role in a large number of measures targeted at drought mitigation. SHGs will be involved in rainwater harvesting, running Public Distribution Scheme and Day Care Centers and overseeing water distribution and utilization in their community. They will also take measures to promote greater equity and efficiency in natural resource management.



G. NDMA GUIDELINES ON MANAGEMENT ON URBAN FLOODING, 2010

This guidelines provides management of urban flooding wherein due importance have been given to women and others by stating that water supply and sanitation facilities may not operate during the floods, or may not be sufficient to meet the needs of those people that are shifted there and children, women, the aged and differently disabled persons will be given special attention. Important consideration of disaster managers includes determining how safe and adequate public evacuation, special healthcare support for women (pregnant and lactating), children, and senior citizens should be provided. The approach of the Disaster Risk Management programme is to focus on building community capacities, community based planning, partnership with all stake-holders and boost capacities at all levels with special emphasis on women to address disasters through an integrated approach for reducing vulnerabilities. In the role of civil society, Women’s Self-Help Groups should be involved in the disaster mitigation process.

H. NDMA GUIDELINES ON MANAGEMENT OF TSUNAMI, 2010

This guideline provides that the target group for the capacity development will include women, for the community based Disaster Response specific women’s group will be organized and specially designed public awareness programmes will be developed for addressing the needs of women and the society.

I. NDMA GUIDELINES ON INCIDENT RESPONSE SYSTEM, 2010

In this guideline wherein stated that States will be encouraged to create response capabilities from within their existing resources. To start with, each State may aim at equipping and training a few companies in smaller states or one battalion equivalent force in the case of bigger states. They will also include women members for looking after the needs of women and children for response to disaster management. This guideline should contain inclusion of local women of disaster prone area and thereby training should be given relating to evacuation so that they can respond themselves and their family during the disaster.

J. NDMA GUIDELINES ON PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT AND MEDICAL HEALTH SERVICES IN DISASTERS, 2009

These guidelines specify that the preparedness plan shall focus on the vulnerable group and may require special relief items like wheel-chairs, medical gadgets, and dignity kits for women. Special care will be provided to pregnant women and women who have lost their spouse. Further basic needs of food, shelter and personal safety that will be at stake, especially for vulnerable groups viz., women, widows, adolescent girls. Mass uprooting of orphan children or widowed women outside the state be prevented as it would add further psychological impact to these survivors. Vulnerable groups like women, children, the aged and the differently disabled are more susceptible to stress and trauma. Generally their special needs are not taken care of, adequately, in the disaster situations due to a number of reasons.

3. STATUS OF INDIAN WOMEN

According to latest census of India (2011), the status of women in India is sort of then male. Looking towards the Sex ratio, there are 930 females per thousand males in India. Main problems of malnutrition, lack of education, poor health, lack of power, marriage, dowry, and female foeticide and infanticide etc. faced by India women and this is the key concern for increasing vulnerability of women and thereby they have been more vulnerable to disasters.

4. TABLE: STATUS OF INDIAN WOMEN (2011)

Social Indicator	India
Infant Mortality rate, per 1000 live births	42
Maternal Mortality Ratio, per 100000 live births	178
Female Literacy Rates (7+ age group) (%)	64.6
Female Literacy Rates (15+ age group) (%)	59.3
School Enrolment @ Primary Level (in Lakh)	672
School Enrolment @ Upper Primary Level (in Lakh)	299
School Enrolment @Secondary Level (in Lakh)	155
School Enrolment @ Senior Secondary Level (in Lakh)	94
School Enrolment @ Higher Education (in Lakh)	130
Gross Enrolment Ratio @Higher Education (%)	19.4
Girls School dropout at primary level (%)	5.34
Earned Income by Female (%)	27



Total Fertility Rate (by Residence)	2.4
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Source:

- (i) Census from_ Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India
- (ii) Education Ratio from_ Ministry of Human Resource Development, India
- (iii) Fertility Rate from_: Sample Registration System-Niti Aayog

5. VULNERABILITY PROFILE OF WOMEN IN DISASTER

The conditions determined by physical, social, economic and environmental factors or processes which increase the susceptibility of an individual, a community, assets or systems to the impacts of hazards.^v All forms of violence against women increase during disasters and displacement.^{vi} As with all humanitarian emergencies, women and girls are among the most vulnerable. Sixty percent of preventable maternal mortality deaths take place in settings of conflict, displacement and natural disasters.^{vii}

- Since 1970, the number of people exposed to floods and tropical cyclones has doubled and women and children face an overwhelming burden during and after the crises.^{viii}
- Women and girls are disproportionately exposed to risk, increased loss of livelihoods, security, and even lives, during and in the aftermath of disasters. During monsoon season in Bangladesh, women and girls are disproportionately affected by flooding as many cannot swim or are unable to leave their homes due to cultural barriers.^{ix}
- Data gaps continue to impede proper understanding of, and prevention and response to the impact of disasters on women and girls as opposed to men and boys. Nonetheless, research has found that:
 - a. Disasters such as droughts, floods and storms kill more women than men due to structural gender inequalities.^x
 - b. During droughts, girls are more likely to miss school as they are needed to collect water and care for family members.^{xi} Droughts and prolonged dry spells also lead to an increase in harmful practices against women such as domestic violence, child marriage, courtship rape and female genital mutilation.^{xii} Women and girls must travel longer distances to collect water, increasing their risk for sexual assault.^{xiii}
 - c. In one province in Indonesia, more than 70 per cent of people who died in the 2004 Asian tsunami were women.^{xiv}
 - d. Hurricane Katrina, which struck New Orleans, USA in 2005, predominantly affected African American women—already the region's poorest, most marginalized community.^{xv}
 - e. An estimated 87 per cent of unmarried women and 100 per cent of married women lost their main source of income when Cyclone Nargis hit the Ayeyarwaddy Delta in Myanmar in 2008.^{xvi}
- After the 2015 earthquake in Nepal, United Nations Fund (UNFPA) estimated that 2 million women and girls of reproductive age had been affected by the crisis, including approximately 126,000 pregnant women. With disruption to normal health services, the Population Fund estimated that 1,500 women per month would have difficulty accessing reproductive health services and consequently face life-threatening complications.^{xvii}
- Studies have found that due to women's roles as care-givers, during natural disasters they are more likely to make sacrifices, such as eating less food, for the well-being of their families. They are also more at risk for economic vulnerability, as men often migrate because of natural disasters. This can lead to divorce, desertion, and polygamy. Child marriage often increases to mitigate this economic vulnerability for young girls.^{xviii}
- During natural disasters, the likelihood of rape, sexual exploitation and risky behavior greatly increases the likelihood of unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections and complications regarding reproductive health.^{xix}
- Disaster damage and loss assessments are seldom disaggregated by sex and are usually recorded in terms of productive resources, which tend to be owned by men. This leads to a substantial undervaluation of the impact on women.^{xx}
- An increase in violence against women, domestic violence and divorce rates have been reported in the aftermath of disasters (Fothergill 1998). They become more vulnerable to abuse in disaster situations. They face difficulty in accessing sanitation facilities. There is lack of privacy and increased risk of sexual assault. In some situations, there are risk of girls and young women being ensnared by traffickers or an increase in early marriages. There is a tendency to leave out women from accessing relief and recovery as they do not have control over resources and institutions (Parkinson 2011). Women headed households, single women, and

widows find it difficult to access information and necessary financial help for recovery and reconstruction.^{xxi}

6. EFFECTS OF DISASTER ON WOMEN

Due to the disastrous event, it would quite become difficult to cope up with such event, however due to better management, its impacts can be reduced still from the various disasters the negative effect has been caused as physically, psychological, and socioeconomically to women.



7. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Women are often the first responders to a crisis, and they can play a central role in the survival and resilience of families and communities. Women and girls are not helpless victims. Humanitarian efforts must recognize the fact that women and girls—like men and boys—have much to contribute in preparing for, and responding to, crises. Women must be included in decision-making about the forms of assistance and protection they need. Humanitarian action can also present opportunities for new and more progressive gender roles and relationships to emerge.^{xxii} Community's vulnerability to disaster depends on the social, cultural, economic and political environment. A cycle of deprivation not only increases their vulnerability but also slowly alienates them from the decision-making process denying accessibility to the basic entitlements. Disasters reinforce, perpetuate and increase gender inequality, making bad situations worse for women. The potential contributions that women can offer to the disaster risk reduction are often overlooked and female leadership in building community resilience to disasters is frequently disregarded.^{xxiii} Based on the vulnerability profile of women in the context of disasters following suggestions for the empowering women in disaster resilient is needed to be strengthened:

- Looking towards the legal and institutional framework it seems necessary for formulating nationwide guidelines specific on vulnerable group as women, children and aged person.
- Awareness regarding the disasters and its impacts should be communicated with women so that they can understand the same and prepare themselves for disasters.
- Inclusion of effective participation of women in decision making process during framing guidelines on disaster management.
- Women centric Early Preparedness Plan should be formulated by Government for the effective pre disaster management.
- Early warning system need be strengthened by inclusion of women group wherein women will evolved the efficient community group and information relating to disaster will be easily communicated.
- Women oriented Capacity development should be carried out to combat the effect of disasters.
- Mock Drill exercise should be provided to women to combat in pre disaster, during and aftermath of disaster occurrence.



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