

Gender in DRR and the Implications of Climate Change in Humanitarian Action

Literature Review on Gender Implications

Background

This note is a summary of findings and gaps from literature related to gender and climate-induced emergencies. Since climate change and its consequences have been moved up the international agenda, it has become increasingly necessary to look at consequences with a “gender lens”.

Humanitarian agencies have in general been slow to take on board climate change and its implications, because it has been an unfamiliar issue that few have felt comfortable to handle. Finally, there is a widespread notion that climate change and its consequences is something that is relevant for the humanitarian community, and the issue is fast becoming a priority of work.

It is in this context that the gender implications of climate change in humanitarian action must be unveiled and gaps being filled. The literature reviewed shows that humanitarian agencies and workers have an important role to play, primarily by making sure that preparedness response and contingency planning are carried out using a gender-specific framework and taking into account existing vulnerabilities for women, girls, boys and men.

The gaps identified by the literature coincide in many ways with the gaps found in Flash Appeals. These are: lack of analysis of gender-differentiated impact of natural disasters; lack of collection and analysis of sex and age disaggregated data; lack of consultation and participation; and lack of gender-specific programming.

Literature Review

Gender concerns in relation to climate change are increasingly being highlighted in literature. Less so, however, gender implications of climate change in humanitarian action. Nevertheless, existing literature is a great source to identifying gaps that can be filled by humanitarian emergencies.

One example is the absence of available data related to gender and climate change. The literature does give a lot of examples on how disasters have a different impact on women and men, but the examples are not supported by data. To collect and use data disaggregated by sex and age is not only imperative to develop an efficient response, but will also tell us more about immediate consequences and short- and long-term effects.

The impacts of climate change amplify existing gender inequalities and strengthen the disparity between women and men in their vulnerability and capability to deal with a changing climate.

More women tend to die or suffer injury from natural disasters than men for different culturally-based reasons, such as prohibition to leave the house or lack of swimming skills. Already impoverished women tend to slip even deeper into poverty and must face increased inequality and discrimination in the wake of natural disasters.

Women’s responsibilities in the family make them more vulnerable to environmental change, which is exacerbated by the impacts of climate change. Drought, deforestation, excessive rainfall, with the



possible consequence of forced migration, increases women's workload. They need to spend more time on collecting fuel and water, which in turn reduces time available for education and participation in political life. In addition, girls are in particular risk of dropping out of school in order to lend their mothers a helping hand.

However, when given the opportunity, women can act as positive agents for change and contribute to adaptation strategies. Through their traditional gender roles, women have gained experience which may prove invaluable in developing disaster risk reduction strategies.

Research has shown that poverty is closely linked to vulnerability to disasters. The reviewed literature agrees that of the world's poor, the majority are women, which make them disproportionately affected by climate changes and resulting disasters. Natural disasters and their impact kill more women than men or shorten the life expectancy more for women than they do for men.¹ This is supported by findings from the tsunami in Sri Lanka (though not a disasters linked to climate change, it is relevant for disaster risk reduction) and the 1991 cyclone in Bangladesh.

The notion that this is based on biology, is discarded by demonstrating that the higher women's socio-economic status, the weaker the effect on the gender gap in life expectancy:

A systematic effect on the gender gap in life expectancy is only plausible if natural disasters exacerbate previously existing patterns of discrimination that render females more vulnerable to the fatal impact of disasters. That this is no mere speculation is demonstrated by the fact that the adverse impact of disasters on females relative to men vanishes with rising socio-economic status of women²

Literature uses examples from Sri Lanka, where women died in the tsunami because they had not been taught to swim, and from Bangladesh, where women were reluctant to look for safe shelter during the 1991 cyclone because culture prohibited them from leaving the house unaccompanied or dress codes made it difficult for them to move fast.

In the aftermath of a disaster, women continue to be disproportionately vulnerable. Their workload normally increases, since access to water and fuel may be more difficult. Men may be forced to migrate to find work, and that leaves women responsible for the household, with all the extra chores it includes. Women are also more likely to become victims of domestic and sexual violence in the wake of a natural disaster.

The literature also highlights the importance of including women in decision-making. This is not because of their vulnerability, but their experience which are valuable input in preparedness and disaster risk reduction. The literature available mentions cases in which women's contribution and inclusion have had a mitigative effect. This makes one article conclude,

Equal involvement of men and women in adaptation planning is important not only to ensure that the measures developed are actually beneficial for those who

¹ Neumayer, Eric and Thomas Plumper, *The Gendered Nature of Natural Disasters: The Impact of Catastrophic Events on the Gender Gap in Life Expectancy, 1981-2002*, final version, January 2007.

² Neumayer et al, *The Gendered Nature of Natural Disasters: The Impact of Catastrophic Events on the Gender Gap in Life Expectancy, 1981-2002*, final version, January 2007, p. 27.



are supposed to implement them, but also to ensure that all relevant knowledge, i.e. knowledge from men *and* women, is integrated into policy and projects³

It is also linked to a rights-based programming approach to disaster risk reduction and preparedness, a request being repeated by several of the articles revised.

The reviewed literature does not discuss particular implications on climate change on men, apart from the fact that they are more likely to migrate than women to find work and provide for their families.

Recommendations

Considering the findings from the reviewed literature, following gender-specific considerations are recommended when managing climate change and humanitarian action:

1. Response preparedness and contingency planning must take into account cultural traits that may have a differentiated impact on women and men.
2. Collect and use data disaggregated by sex and age for project planning and documentation of effects. Any appeal or project proposal should always include data on deaths disaggregated by sex. This has serious implications for project implementation. E.g. what happens to men when women die?
3. Involve women in all stages of decision-making
4. Identify and provide sex-specific needs
5. Pay attention to groups in risk of social exclusion and that may have difficulties accessing aid (e.g. single-headed households)

³ Skutsch, et al, Mainstreaming Gender into the Climate Change Regime, 14 December 2004 COP10 Buenos Aires

