



# **The Disaster Risk Reduction Process: A Gender Perspective**

**A Contribution to the 2009 ISDR Global Assessment Report on Disaster  
Risk Reduction**

**Inputs from the Gender and Disasters Network,  
Facilitated by UNISDR, Geneva**

**February 2009**

## 1. Introduction

Gender equality refers to equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities for women and men in policy making and programmes where the interests, concerns and needs of both genders are equally considered and met.

Good practices of gender-inclusive disaster risk reduction (DRR) worldwide provide strong evidence that a gender-balanced approach to DRR benefits both men and women - with *men and women* meaning practically everyone, including families, communities and nations to some extent. Equal and active participation of women and men in DRR makes it possible to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), sustainable socio-economic development and the overarching goal of the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) of building the resilience of nations and communities to disasters.

Gender issues in development and disasters are relatively well established and have been acknowledged globally at the highest levels. Within the development context, disasters showcase and highlight gendered imbalances in society. This includes both vulnerabilities and capacities, and social and economic imbalances arising from class, caste, disability and minority status. Aspects of gender cut across all segments of society and have implications for every action and move towards sustainable development, where DRR acts as a non-negotiable parameter. Thus, mainstreaming gender perspectives into the DRR process offers new opportunities to advance gender equality in the socio-economic development process.

Promoting gender equality in DRR requires multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder approaches. Gender and DRR issues need to be addressed through political, social, economic, scientific and technical, and humanitarian approaches, where everyone can make a contribution. All citizens have a role to play and should assume some responsibility and accountability for advancing gender equality in DRR.

At the global level, available information shows that efforts to promote gender equality in DRR have focused on advocacy and/or awareness-raising, along with support for policy changes and gender mainstreaming in inter-governmental processes. Thanks to the consistent efforts and support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction Secretariat (UNISDR) in cooperation with other UN and international agencies, gender is now on the international agenda and featured in some inter-governmental processes.

There has recently been a critical shift in the mainstreaming of gender considerations into DRR: from a women-focused approach to a gender-focused approach based on the belief that gender relations in DRR should be analyzed within a socio-economic and cultural context. On top of this shift, the strategic focus of DRR and disaster management has changed from reactive disaster response to long-term proactive disaster risk and vulnerability reduction where gender and DRR considerations are considered necessary to achieve sustainable development.

A number of regional inter-governmental level policies and strategies focusing on disaster management and DRR have come into place over the last five years or so. Unfortunately, commitment to gender issues is rarely stated explicitly; rather, it tends to be seen as an implicit part of the larger commitment to implement the HFA and achieve MDGs. The efforts of regional non-governmental development organizations to address gender-based issues at the programme or operational level are typically implemented in an ad hoc and inconsistent

manner. For the most part, the increase in recognition of gender issues at the regional level is due to the dedicated work of a handful of organizations and women's/gender activist groups.

Good practices in gender and disaster risk reduction available from donor organizations, UN country-based offices and NGOs highlight the important contributions of a gender-sensitive approach in reducing community vulnerability to disasters. This, however, has not changed the marginalization of gender issues in national reports on disaster risk reduction. In 2004, only 19 of the 118 countries mentioned gender or women's issues in their national report prepared for the World Conference on Disaster Reduction. In 2007, only 8 among 61 reports received by UNISDR for the first session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction touched on Gender or Women issues briefly. Gender perspectives have not yet received adequate attention at national level in the disaster risk reduction process.

Some NGOs and the academic community have contributed substantially to promoting gender perspectives in disaster risk reduction. NGOs have gained considerable experience in the gender aspects of disaster risk reduction at grassroots level. The important role played by NGOs and the academic community has been accounted for in some national reports.

In short, while progress has been made in gender and DRR areas, it has been slow and inconsistent. Lack of understanding, political accountability and capacity on gender and DRR poses great challenges to the international community. Overcoming these obstacles requires greater understanding and political accountability of, and increased institutional capacity for the two important issues.

## 2. The gender issue

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.

Within gender relations there are strong imbalances between men and women that are typically unfavourable towards women. In general, women occupy a subordinated status in the family, community and society at large. Gender-based relations, in particular power relations, and established social and institutional structures and attitudes effectively lead to the subordination of women, denying them opportunities and interfering with their rights as individuals. Such an imbalanced gender relationship prevents women from enjoying equal-rights and equal-partners status - as policy makers, contributors and beneficiaries of development and DRR processes. Gender relations, however, are not static or permanent; they are learned behaviours that vary by location, culture, class, ethnicity and religion, and change over time.

Powers and opportunities to contribute to, and benefit from, development have typically been confined to men, since traditional development approaches have largely targeted and viewed men as the heads of households, farmers, bread winners. Women have been seen merely as housewives, secondary earners and mothers within the context of the family/household unit and mostly addressed in these stereotyped roles, if at all. Although gender issues in the development context are fairly well researched and debated, women are still largely marginalized in the development process.

### 3. The gender issue in DRR

In essence, gender relations in disasters reflect gender relations in society. Owing to different life experiences, women and men differ in how they experience, respond to, and recover from disasters. When disaster strikes, men and women have different abilities and ways of responding, and, in the end, the impacts are different. It has been widely observed, researched and documented that women are more vulnerable than their male counterparts of the same social classes, races, ethnic and age groups during all phases of a disaster. Gender-based social, economic, religious and cultural constructs marginalize women across all communities and groups, irrespective of class, caste, economic standing, status, ethnicity or age. Therefore, addressing gender relations in DRR requires more attention to the status of women, along with the challenges they face.

Compared with men, more than 60 per cent 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 skilled 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.

Such a socially subordinated position of women leads to a compounded status of vulnerability across all categories of women. Gender-based inequalities and vulnerabilities place women at greater degrees of risk to disasters, including less access to disaster early warning, to policy and decision making in risk reduction and disaster management, to knowledge and information, to relief assistance, in addition to higher level of illiteracy, poverty and risk of sexual and domestic violence and sexual abuse. Disaster situations, with the breakdown of family, community and institutional security and protection, generally make prevailing gender-based disparities surface to a greater degree than in normal situations, putting already vulnerable groups at higher risk. Women, in this context, can be identified as among the most vulnerable groups in most societies.

Men, too, can be harmed by gender-based social expectations, especially in the aftermath of disasters. Socially and culturally, they are expected to deal with their own losses and grieve alone. The formal aspects of psychosocial support bypass men, since, according to stereotypical views, they are expected to be strong and face the crisis in a manly manner. While there may be specific interventions to help widows and female-headed households recover, the concerns of widowers who are left with the responsibility of raising young families are often not addressed. Furthermore, gender-based social conditioning does not give men the necessary resources to develop skills in domestic chores and care giving. This situation often goes overlooked in gender-blind disaster recovery interventions. As a result,

gaps in men's coping capacities in such circumstances can victimize them in the recovery process.

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 roles 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 disadvantaged 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-biased 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 contributing to risk reduction and disaster management. Good practices of gender-inclusive DRR observed across the globe are evidence of this.

#### 4. 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-won progress is largely due to consistent global advocacy and awareness-raising on gender equality in DRR and technical support from the UNDP and UNISDR, in cooperation with other UN agencies, regional organizations and civil societies.

##### *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 the 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 implications for long-term outcomes.

To support the promotion of gender mainstreaming into DRR, the participants agreed to develop a *Gender and Disaster Sourcebook* 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.

In preparation for the January 2005 WCDR II held in Kobe, Japan, the Platform on Gender Equality and Disaster Risk Reduction requested all nations represented at the World Conference to consider gender mainstreaming in five areas by:

- Mainstreaming gender perspectives into all disaster management initiatives;
- Building capacity in women's groups and community-based organizations;
- Ensuring gender mainstreaming into communications, training and education;
- Ensuring opportunities for women in science and technology; and
- Ensuring gender mainstreaming into programme implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

To build on the progress made, the *Gender and Disaster Risk Reduction* theme was included on the agenda of the 2006 International Disaster Reduction Conference in Davos, Switzerland. Participants emphasized that gender issues were an integral part of DRR, and that it was imperative for specific needs and contributions of both men and women to be mainstreamed throughout practices, science, data collation, and policy and decision making. In addition, they emphasized the need for raising awareness and building capacity among planners, decision makers and practitioners.

In 2007, the World Bank's Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (GF/DRR) organized the Stockholm Forum for Disaster Reduction and Recovery, in cooperation with the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) and UNISDR. The Forum recognized the need for long-term, gender-inclusive engagement to address the underlying vulnerability and poverty factors that affect the resilience of communities to disasters and climate change. This required engagement was presented as an important contribution to sustaining progress towards the MDGs and sustainable development.

By looking at these past global events, it is apparent that progressive advocacy and awareness-raising has contributed to the improved understanding that both DRR and gender issues are cross-cutting matters that must be factored into all development sectors. These issues cannot be dealt with by isolating them from socio-economic development contexts.

### ***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, 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."

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 (UNFPA) and UNDP are leading a project to develop gender-aware profiles for countries at risk 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 concerns 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 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 governments' 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, that a gender-inclusive approach to DRR is likely to achieve win-win results for families and communities which both men and women care 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 on gender and DRR issues, gender-inclusive early warning, guidelines for gender-based risk assessment, gender-inclusive indicators for DRR, and a gender and DRR bibliography.

### *Gender considerations on the international agenda on 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 63<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly, the UN Secretary-General reported on the increased promotion of gender mainstreaming by 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 a multi-stakeholder expert meeting to advance policy guidance and development of training modules for capacity building on gender and disaster risk reduction.

## **5. Regional Progress in promoting gender issues in DRR**

Awareness of gender-based disaster impact has grown at the regional level, resulting in increased pressure on disaster response management agencies and the disaster management institutional machinery. There is a progressive trend towards increased attention to the issue in policy and practice, albeit at a slow pace and in an ad hoc manner. A number of key inter-governmental DRR-focused mechanisms have been established over the last five years, but the progress of gender in DRR lags behind overall DRR regional progress.

At the inter-governmental level, specific commitment to the issue was made with the Delhi Declaration resulting from the 2nd Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction, which took place in November 2007. The Declaration contained the following explicit recommendation: “Encourage the national governments to make special efforts to mainstream gender issues in disaster risk reduction so as to reduce the vulnerability of women and to recognize the important role women can play in disaster risk reduction.”

Disaster-related policy and strategy documentation of many other inter-governmental organizations make no explicit reference and commitment to gender issues; it is only implicitly stated through references to HFA, sustainable development and MDGs, all of which include reference to gender issues in development and DRR. For example, the 2006 South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Comprehensive Framework on Disaster Management notes that it is aligned with the implementation of the HFA. Similarly, the 2005 Association for South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response included in its principles, ‘The Parties shall, to the extent possible,



mainstream disaster risk reduction efforts into sustainable development policies, planning and programming at all levels.'

The 11th Ministerial Session of the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement states that it resolves to "Promote that disaster reduction, as a fundamental element of sustainable development, becomes a national and local priority, *inter alia* by strengthening national mechanisms, the integration of risk reduction in development and planning policies." The document also makes reference to the implementation of the priorities for action laid down in the HFA, MDG s and WSSD, promotion of community based risk reduction, and awareness in cooperation and partnership with local and regional authorities.

Unfortunately, this commitment to global frameworks which include addressing gender as a cross-cutting priority does not get translated to regional policies, legislation and practices that mainstream gender issues.

Similarly, most international NGOs and development organizations with regional level operations related to disaster management, such as the International Federation of the Red Cross, Action Aid and Practical Action, make no explicit commitment to the issue in their strategy documents. On the other hand, there are some efforts to address gender issues at the operational level. These efforts typically manifest through programmes that target women; however, no evidence exists that these efforts are consistently being followed through or if they address gender relations overall in DRR. This is indicative of gaps in understanding of gender issues at the organizational planning and implementation levels.

At the regional level, Africa was the continent with the highest achievements in terms of gender mainstreaming at government level. The highest number of national reports which referred to women's or gender issues came from Africa. In fact, Africa has a Regional Plan of Action and Guidelines for Mainstreaming Disaster Risk Assessment into Development, in which the importance of gender is discussed. However, not all African countries were at the same stage of development with regard to gender mainstreaming the disaster risk reduction process. Some countries are still developing their disaster reduction plans and it is expected that this work would provide scope for mainstreaming gender into their policies, legislation and strategies.

In Asia, some progress has also been made in producing information, guidelines and capacity building on the subject. For instance, guidelines for addressing gender issues in disaster management in the Asia region have been produced by Duryog Nivaran/Practical Action, International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development and the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development.

Support by international donors for the gender and DRR theme is far from adequate, with the exception of isolated initiatives by the European Commission's humanitarian aid department and the United Kingdom Department of International Development's Conflict and Humanitarian Affairs Department.

### *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 Equity Learning Community organized their First Regional Meeting on Risk Management and Gender Equity in 2007 and conducted a project called *Knowledge Management for the Transversality of 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. Other major initiatives and factors contributing to gender-inclusive DRR**

Activities and events at national and regional levels, particularly those that are part of international and local NGOs and women's organizations, have resulted in greater awareness of the issue. There are a number of active and dedicated groups that are placing gender and DRR high on their agendas. Through concerted efforts, their advocacy and lobbying activities, along with the above-mentioned international activities and events, have increased recognition of the need for gender perspectives in DRR at both the international and national levels. Additionally, relevant analytical frameworks and tools have been developed. Several research initiatives have been implemented, and organizational policies that have some relevance have been written.

The actions taken by many groups on this issue are noteworthy. Some examples include:

- Efforts by the existing Gender and Disasters Network to share knowledge and best practices;
- Initiatives by UNICEF's Regional Office for South Asia on education and gender aspects of disasters;
- Concrete actions by UNDP's Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery to mainstream gender into all of their programmes, formulate strategies with the goal of gender mainstreaming in mind, and develop gender-focused assessments and knowledge products;
- Efforts by Duryog Nivaran (Network for Disaster Mitigation in South Asia) and Practical Action South Asia (Intermediate Technology Development Group South Asia) to research gender aspects of DRR and develop analytical frameworks; and

- Community level initiatives by GROOTS (Grassroots Organizations Operating Together in Sisterhood International), an international network of grassroots women's organizations.

Major disasters that have occurred over the past decade, such as the Indian Ocean Tsunami, Hurricane Katrina and the Kashmir Earthquake, have showcased the gendered aspects of disaster risk and vulnerability to disasters. As a result, the issue now receives greater attention from researchers, academics, and relief and recovery agencies. The knowledge and awareness already available makes the dire situation and gender gaps highly visible.

Furthermore, following the above-mentioned disasters, response and recovery programmes encountered heavy criticism for gender insensitive practices that often made the situation for women worse. Consequently, there has been a rapid escalation of discussions, research, media attention, networking, visuals and knowledge products that raise the profile of the issue and widen the available range of material for reference, awareness building and application.

## 7. 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.

A few national reports (Ghana, Iran and Pakistan) dealt with gender issues in the context of poverty reduction but they neither analyzed nor discussed women's poverty-induced vulnerability in relation to disasters, nor their unique capabilities to reduce vulnerability. In the national reports submitted by Honduras and Nicaragua, women's issues were dealt with based on the impact of Hurricane Mitch, but the two countries never mentioned whether they had incorporated a sound gender perspective into their national contexts. El Salvador and Haiti made a brief reference to the important role women played in disaster risk reduction but there were few examples of gender inclusiveness.

India was the only country that addressed the importance of accounting for women's vulnerability and women's role in its national strategy, but there was no elaboration of a broader gender focus. Iran referred to the importance of women in several sections of its national report. Iran was the only country that expressed its commitment to mainstream gender issues in all sectors, from grassroots to policy dialogue. Iran was also one of the few countries that referred to the various international frameworks on gender. In the Philippines national report, women issues were mentioned but with no link with disaster risk reduction.

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 dealing 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 disaster risk reduction is widespread among most countries and it is high time for governments and UN agencies to take actions.

## 8. Challenges to gender-inclusive DRR

Progress in mainstreaming gender into DRR is largely inadequate and slow. Gender considerations still remain largely marginalized from the DRR process. This is particularly true at the national level where programme interventions are expected to take place. In other words, promoting gender equality in DRR remains a big challenge to the international community. Below are the key factors of hindrance in this path, which are inter-connected:

- *Poor understanding of Gender-DRR linkages at conceptual and practice levels, especially at national level*

Poor understanding of gender aspects in DRR at the policy and practitioner levels is a major obstacle. Gender equality in DRR does not mean merely addressing women's humanitarian issues - it means addressing the concerns of both men and women, the relations between them and the root causes of imbalances. Gender equality is incorrectly perceived as 'women's equality' and the responsibilities of Gender Focal Points do not encourage significant engagement from a wide range of stakeholders from both development and humanitarian communities. This further marginalizes and isolates the issue from the mainstream. A large majority of professionals and decision makers in the development and disaster fields lack sufficient awareness of gender issues. This causes the issue to become de-prioritized as 'women's concerns' and results in stereotypical women's programmes.

Furthermore, gender continues to be identified as an 'add on' aspect, rather than an integral component in development and DRR. The development and DRR fields now contain relatively new dimensions, such as climate change issues, that compete for donors and to be considered programme priorities. This means that gender issues become de-prioritized to some extent. This trend further takes attention away from the gender and DRR issue. It also further highlights that many people fail to understand that gender needs to be considered as a central and cross-cutting issue in all aspects of development.

- *Lack of genuine political accountability and financial resources for global advocacy and action on gender and DRR*

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), signed by 185 countries, provides a legal framework for gender equality in DRR. The HFA, endorsed by 168 countries, provides a policy environment for gender mainstreaming into DRR. However, the gap between political commitment and financial resources remains considerable and consistent long-term commitment to mainstreaming gender perspectives into DRR is lacking. Presently, most global events promoting gender perspectives are organized by gender experts who are not fully engaged in that capacity within their institutions, so a visible gap in institutional commitment exists. Also, there is a clear lack of commitment with regard to resources for both gender and DRR. This forces the organizers of these events to adjust to what resources and opportunities become available. Lastly, gender and DRR events have not really been linked with inter-governmental DRR processes in recent years. Due to this disconnect, recommendations produced regarding gender at these events have a limited impact because they are not been considered or implemented by national governments and UN agencies.

- *Lack of institutional and individual capacity and tools to mainstream gender and DRR*

The progress made on highlighting gender issues in DRR does not seem to have triggered significant changes at the national and community levels. Gender and DRR knowledge and capacity are still possessed by only a relatively small group of professionals and practitioners working in these respective two areas. The majority of disaster managers and professionals often lack the knowledge required to address gender issues in DRR. Similarly, Gender Focal Points in the development field frequently lack the technical expertise needed to use DRR as an opportunity to promote gender equality.

## 6. Conclusions and Recommendations

There has not been any substantial progress made in mainstreaming gender in DRR due to the following reasons:

- The absence of concerted and coordinated efforts by global, regional and national actors;
- Poor financial commitments and investments; and
- The absence of any visible and tangible commitment to pursue the issue at the operational level.

Commitment to the issue largely remains in the documentation alone. There have been no significant moves to translate words into actions in terms of concrete policies, finances, substantive programmes or accountability measures. Gender mainstreaming in DRR remains a free choice with no accountability, no checks and balances, no ownership, and no medium or long-term commitment.

International frameworks, especially those related to the HFA and MDGs, are expected to put pressure on national and regional bodies, funding agencies and academics and eventually secure their commitment in terms of policies, research, funding allocations and application outcomes; however, the frameworks have not yet led to any significant changes in policy, legislation, financing or programming. In addition, donors and institutions view new and emerging themes, such as climate change adaptations, as taking precedence over gender. Gender issues, therefore, have been de-prioritized to some extent. This further illustrates the

lack of understanding that gender is a cross-cutting aspect throughout the entire development process.

Gender issues are currently being approached and understood in a way that tends to isolate them from the development and DRR processes. This outcome, in effect, is the opposite of mainstreaming gender. Specifically, this practice results in the following:

- The continuation of the portrayal or equating of gender issues as 'women's issues';
- The appointment of gender desks and focal points that lack the required commitment and accountability of a multi-disciplinary organizational approach - this results in further compartmentalization;
- The application of 'gender expertise' in isolation of the development and DRR processes; and
- The predominance of women raising gender issues and a noticeable lack of male champions on gender-related causes in other disciplines.

The following is a summary of recommendations for achieving greater gender inclusiveness in DRR policy and practice. The recommendations are made with reference to each of the major challenges previously mentioned.

ISDR System partners need to adopt the rights-based approach to address gender inequality. At the same time, they need to act collectively to secure long-term political commitment and gain adequate financial resources to address gender issues in DRR through global advocacy, policy coordination, capacity building and long-term national and local programmes. This can be achieved using the legal and policy guidance provided for gender equity and mainstreaming in DRR in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the HFA.

- ***Improve conceptual and practical understanding of Gender-DRR linkages, particularly at the national level***

Context-specific conceptual and policy guidance aimed at the national levels is needed to bring more clarity on gender issues in development and DRR. This guidance should encompass complex and emerging issues such as climate change and adaptations. Specific attention should be placed on removing misconceptions on the issue, with particular reference to the following: gender issues being equated with women's issues; Gender Focal Points who largely deal with women's issues; and gender being treated as an added, rather than integral, aspect of the disaster reduction and development processes.

- Provide comprehensive, concrete and context-specific policies, guidelines, tools and methodologies based on existing global frameworks such as CEDAW, MDGs and HFA; and
- Develop operational guidelines to facilitate gender-inclusive implementation of each of the five priorities of action outlined in the HFA based on the framework's reference to gender as a cross-cutting theme.

- ***Build institutional and individual capacity and tools to mainstream gender and DRR***

A paradigm shift is needed to build capacity for gender mainstreaming into DRR more effectively. Approaches used must move away from the trend of keeping gender issues separate, isolated and the domain of only a handful of specialists, towards creatively

supporting the true integration of gender issues. Large-scale and systematic capacity building for integrating gender perspectives into DRR is necessary. This must involve a broad range of development and disaster reduction professionals at policy, planning and practice levels.

- Seek avenues to include DRR and gender equity into secondary and higher education curricula of all key disciplines in the technical and social sciences; and
  - Make it mandatory for development and DRR professionals to obtain training/capacities on gender integration concepts and tools.
- *Increase genuine political accountability and financial resources for global advocacy and action on gender and DRR*

There are numerous policy documents in which political commitment to mainstream gender issues into DRR is clearly stated; however, no tangible or sustainable progress has resulted, with the exception of some ad hoc activities. Furthermore, there has not been any substantial progress made in mobilizing resources.

- Make gender and DRR part of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction agenda;
- Encourage the Global Platform to propose and obtain time-bound commitment on introducing specific accountability and monitoring mechanisms on gender mainstreaming into DRR from donors, inter-governmental organisations and national governments;
- Introduce accountability mechanisms and specific progress monitoring indicators for all the stakeholders; and
- Encourage National Platforms in each country to develop gender mainstreaming policies and strategies, as well as indicators of progress, which can be fed into the regular HFA monitoring process.