Gender and Inclusion in Disaster Risk Management in Nepal

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1. Introduction (Global Context)

In the Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) community, there is broad understanding that gender equality – *when women and men enjoy equal rights, opportunities and entitlements in civil and political life* – is a fundamental part of increased resilience to disasters (UN, FAO). Inclusion is a condition for community resilience not a choice. A community can only be safe when all its members are able to cope better to avert disasters. Inclusive DRM recognizes that people face different risks and barriers based on their capacities and capabilities. For this reason, responses should be tailored and empowering. Building equal opportunities and scope of action on risks will make a difference for excluded people, and the whole community will be more resilient because everybody will be safer (a win-win situation). Inclusion promotes equity and rights in DRM actions so that everybody is less vulnerable. Excluded people at risk are often more vulnerable than others. DRM processes are often blind to the needs of the excluded, and they may in fact generate more risks for them. By supporting excluded people first and foremost, we can achieve the equity needed to allow everybody to enjoy the right to be safe. Since women and excluded groups are often the most vulnerable during and after a disaster, special attention on their needs, roles and responsibilities is critical.

SFDRR has prioritized the engagement and participation of vulnerable (at risk) groups in all stages of DRM cycle. Participatory governance is at heart of the UN SFDRR that requires; an all-of-society engagement and partnership; empowerment of local communities in DRR; inclusive, accessible and non-discriminatory participation of vulnerable groups in decision making and DRR actions; access to resources and capacity development opportunities; access to early warning information; and empowerment for leadership role. Overall, more than 1.5 billion people have been affected by disasters in various ways, with women, children and people in vulnerable situations are disproportionately affected. Governments should engage with relevant stakeholders including women, children and youth, persons with disabilities, poor people, migrants, indigenous people, volunteers, and the community of practitioners and older persons in the design and implementation of policies, plans and standards. SFDRR also calls for more people-centred preventative approach to disaster risk, which is impossible without the engagement and participation of at-risk-groups in meaningful way. SFDRR has prioritized the need to empower women and persons with disabilities to publicly lead and promote gender equitable and universally accessible response, recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction for **"Build Back Better".**

Agenda for Humanity has internalized "Leave No One Behind" as one of its 5 core responsibilities. This means reaching everyone and empowering all women, men, girls and boys, excluded groups, marginalized communities to be the agents of positive transformation. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has addressed special vulnerabilities of vulnerable groups and leaving no one behind in DRR and building resilience. The 2030 Agenda has emphasized that people who are vulnerable must be empowered. Those whose needs are reflected in the agenda include all children, youth, persons with disabilities (of whom more than 80 per cent live in poverty), people living with HIV/AIDS, older persons, indigenous peoples, refugees and internally displaced

persons and migrants. The Core Humanitarian Standard of Sphere has kept the disaster affected people at the center of response with more focus on the at-risk-groups and ensured their engagement and participation in response design and implementation. Similarly, the Beijing Declaration emphasizes the equal opportunity to women and girls for their empowerment and right. ***This is why new governance approaches promoting the inclusion and engagement of vulnerable groups are essential in DRR policy design, implementation and monitoring.***

2. National Context on Inclusive DRRM

Nepal has an age-long patriarchal social, economic, political and cultural setup that is deeply entrenched and widespread in which women and Dalits are the hardest-hit. The recent wave of political change in the country has brought significant progress in addressing these issues, supported by positive national and international commitments and affirmative action towards marginalized populations. With the promulgation of the new Constitution, it is important for the government to align its development strategy and priorities with overall development process in tune with the Sustainable Development Goals. Women, children, elderly, PWDs and economically and socially marginalized community and individuals are the most affected by disasters. There is need to ensure inclusiveness of these groups by increasing their accessibility, representation and meaningful participation in overall spectrum of DRRM.

Being committed to the global DRRM frameworks and regulations including Constitutional provision, Nepal has made significant progress developing important policy frameworks and institutional arrangements on DRRM. The recent policy provisions such as Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act 2074, National Policy for Disaster Risk Reduction 2018, Disaster Risk Reduction National Strategic Plan of Action (2018-2030) have prioritized the engagement and participation of women and vulnerable groups in different processes of disaster risk management. However, the challenge still exists in the implementation of these provisions during localization process. The Constitution of Nepal and DRRM Act 2074 guide Nepal's current landscape of disaster governance. However, the mandatory inclusion of women and at-risk-groups representation in governance structures at federal level seems insufficient. The act has provisioned mandatory representation of at least one women in the executive committee. Hence, in addition to reserved quota, their equitable right of participation should be considered and encouraged. Inclusive representation in governance structures at federal level will encourage inclusive localization of policy provisions, strategies and actions plans.

The local level DRRM policies are inadequately addressing the issues of inclusive governance due to various reasons. Inadequate DRRM capacity and willingness of inclusion are major reason behind this policy gap. Recent data on DRRM governance at local level shows that 593 local level has prepared the DRRM Act and 646 DRRM fund mobilization guideline; however the concern here is how inclusive is the policies and formulation process. In most of the local DRRM act, it is observed that women and other at-risk-groups are considered only victims of disaster but not an active agent of social change. They are mostly considered for disaster response but not involved in the policy and plan formulation process. Hence, the policies and plans fail to address their need

and mostly their diverse need are overlooked. The need of PwDs, LGBTQI is diverse and their needs are mostly overlooked because their meaningful participation in DRRM is lacking. It is important to empower local government for inclusive disaster policies ensuring effective preparedness, response, recovery and reconstruction to establish a resilient society.

The DRR National Strategic Plan of Action (2018-2030) has ensured inclusiveness in Disaster Risk Reduction as one of the priority actions under priority area 2: **Strengthening Disaster Risk Governance at Federal, Provincial and Local Level;** however there are various challenges to implement at local level due to inadequate representation of at-risk-groups in governance structures. Province and local level are formulating the strategic action plan in line with the national plan of action, which strongly need the participation of women, PwDs, elderly and marginalized groups in all processes to make it inclusive. Role of women and at-risk-groups in structures, system strategy and implementation is prerequisite for sustainable development. It is their right to be participated and responsibility to contribute in DRRM. Though women are different humankind than men but bears equal right to opportunities and responsibilities.

The national plan of action has prioritized few strategic actions to ensure inclusiveness in DRRM such as implementing gender sensitive and inclusive approach in all the processes of DRM, establish and institutionalize disaster risk concern groups to promote their empowerment and partnership by increasing participation of the most affected, less resilient and highly vulnerable groups in disaster risk governance activities, preparing gender equity and inclusion action plan for DRM, social mobilization programs at local level for accessibility, representation and participation in DRM plan formulation process and DRR special programs based on the priority of most vulnerable groups of the society. The strategic actions will be implemented effectively only ensuring the inclusion in DRRM organizational structures, legal and regulatory framework development process and access to capacity development, collaboration and partnership.

In addition, the Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR, 2016-2030) firmly establishes that persons with disabilities and their advocacy organizations are legitimate stakeholders and actors in the design and implementation of DRR policies and practices. Often, government, NGOs, and relief organizations lack information and knowledge about the issues, concerns, needs, and aspiration of persons with disabilities. The government and other service-providing stakeholders are not well-versed in the benefits of adopting a disability-inclusive DRR (DiDRR). Nepal has recently adopted a DiDRR but its full implementation has yet to be realized and the relatively weak information systems related to DRR and disability have resulted in ignorance about the inclusion issues related to persons with disabilities.

3. Situation at the ground level

Nepal is fostering the policies for inclusive disaster risk management however there are various gaps in the policy localization and program implementation, which needs to be well addressed immediately. WHDRRP has conducted consultations with province, local, ward and community

level women leadership to identify the major issues and challenges in fostering women leadership and inclusion in DRRM. Some major gaps/issues are mentioned below:

- Women's representation in leadership role is not encouraged and they have less representation in decision making position (they are encouraged only for supportive role)
- Women representatives do not have budgetary decision making power though they have capacity (**consultation with deputy mayors from different provinces**)
- Inadequate representation of women and other at risk groups (PWDs, Elderly, LGBTQI, Dalits and marginalized) in DRM governance structures from federal to local level, hence their need overlooked
- Deputy mayors/vice chairperson are not given authority to mobilize resources and budgets for DRM programs and there is need of technical capacity enhancement to foster their leadership role in DRRM
- Representation of people with disability and other marginalised groups in DRM structure at local level is minimal such as guideline, standards development process (hence their special needs are overlooked in disaster response)
- The focus still seem to be on responding to disaster rather than inclusive prevention (they are taken as victim of disaster not an agent of change, they are considered as a victim to respond in disaster response only in local DRM act)
- Elected women representatives at ward level are facing difficulties to fulfil their responsibilities due to social and personal circumstances, hence some of them are waiting for next election to leave the responsibility (not enabling environment to foster the women leadership)
- Vulnerable (at-risk-groups) have very less access to relief and resources in humanitarian response and the problem is very prominent in PWDs, their diverse need are not measured and addressed during disasters
- Women leadership role only entertained at home but not in the social development process (not given the decision making role, most of the LDMCs are chaired by the Mayors/Chairpersons)
- Access to DRM information to ward level women representatives is lacking hence they are not able to take part in capacity development opportunities resulting very less active role in DRR decision makings and programs
- Politically influenced and interest based relief distribution in some local level during Covid-19, due to which real victims are not able to get any support
- Excluded groups such as LGBTQI, Sex Workers, HIV people are facing humiliation and hesitation in quarantine centers and shelters during pandemics and disasters
- Challenge in inclusive information sharing and risk communication (information materials difficult to address the need of diverse groups such as different types of disabilities)
- Inadequate risk profiling and disaster information management system at local level and at-risk-groups are less involved in risk assessment process (not inclusive implementation)

4. **Gender and Inclusion good practices** (consultations with women leaders from province, palika, wards and community disaster management committee)

- Important policy provisions to ensure the inclusive governance in DRRM and in the process of localization (a roadway to work ahead for gender and inclusion); Law Abiding Scenario
- The concept of disability inclusive DRR and inclusive DRR governance is coming as an important agenda of discussions from national to local level (Realization and sensitization)
- Local levels are empowering deputy mayors to take the responsibility of LDMCs and quarantine management so that quarantine centers are disable friendly and gender sensitive and this also is fostering their leadership role in DRRM
- Deputy mayors are proactively conducting discourses with their women ward members to update and share the situation of quarantine centers including the need of the ward members to manage their responsibilities
- Disability organizations, LGBTQI groups are conducting dialogue and discourses for their voices to be heard and CSOs are supporting in policy dialogues
- Different women networks are coming together for solidarity and to raise the voice of women and excluded groups who are more at-risk in disasters
- CSOs advocating the governance and inclusion agenda to sensitize and support government initiatives
- Local level elected women representatives have started sensitizing on their role and responsibilities for DRRM

5. **Recommendation for Inclusive Disaster Risk Management**

The representation of women and at-risk-groups in governance structures from national to local level (**ensure representation at governance structures**) is inevitable. Hence at local level the governance structures need to reform if not inclusive. As women are over 50% of the population in the country and household heads in many districts where male member is abroad, resilience will not materialize without their meaningful participation. There should be allocated targeted resource (vulnerable groups) and support along with responsibility and accountability. Including relevant stakeholders, at-risk-groups should be participated, engaged and empowered in all stages of DRM cycle; not only respond but in planning/preparedness. At local level gender-sensitive and inclusive budget (specific plans and programs for at-risk-groups) in DRM theme is necessary. The good disaster management actions conducted by women elected representatives should be acknowledged and male counterparts should change the preoccupied male dominant mindset. Bringing the most vulnerable groups in the consultation/discussion/designing to hear their challenges during disaster events for effective response is required for leave no one behind. The representation and meaningful participation of women and others vulnerable groups in DRR decision making process, program implementations, monitoring and evaluation is strongly recommended. Inclusion in DRM is their right and responsibility so their representation should be strongly encouraged because the issue and challenges of women and vulnerable groups cannot be spoken by people other than this group. The strategic actions envisioned in the national plan of action and local level DRM plans should be implemented in partnership, engagement and meaningful participation of women, PwDs, Elderly and other at-risk groups.

6. Conclusion

Disaster risk reduction requires an all-of-society engagement and partnership. When a disaster strikes, public services are often paralyzed and therefore, community systems must be well-placed in order to function effectively. In order to achieve an effective community system, girls and women of all sections within the community and other socially excluded groups must have the knowledge and capacity to respond to disasters. Inclusion is a condition for DRR governance and community resilience. Localization of global and national frameworks and endorsement in all three tiers of government structure is the upcoming action to government and non-government stakeholders of Nepal. It is time to enable local government to adopt the "Global to Local" concept. Meanwhile, the gender and inclusion envisioned in SFDRR, Agenda for Humanity, SDGs, Sphere and National policy frameworks of Nepal should be implemented from national to local level ensuring representation, meaningful participation and engagement of at-risk-groups in all the spectrum of DRRM for resilience society and sustainable development. Studies have shown that empowering women and excluded groups as an active agent of change in DRM creates an enabling ecosystem.