

POLICY BRIEF

GENDER-RESPONSIVE DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

OVERVIEW

“Well-designed disaster risk reduction and climate change initiatives that provide for the full and effective participation of women can advance substantive gender equality and the empowerment of women, while ensuring that sustainable development, disaster risk reduction and climate change objectives are achieved.”

CEDAW General Recommendation 37, Article 7

Gender inequality, coupled with climate and environment crises, is the greatest sustainable development challenge of the present time.¹ In the past twenty years climate-related disasters have almost doubled, exacerbating inequalities within and between countries.² The impact of gender norms, roles and relations on people’s lives within a given culture and society is critical to understanding and reducing disaster risk, with gender discrimination often limiting the control that women and girls have over decisions that govern their lives, as well as their access to resources and opportunities. This heightens their exposure to risk, resulting in women and girls experiencing higher mortality, morbidity and loss of livelihoods during disasters.

At the same time, disaster risk constrains our collective progress towards gender equality and achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Disasters exacerbate the prevailing gender inequalities that exist in societies. This can be seen in the disproportionate impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on women and girls with limited social safety nets and fiscal stimulus available to women, a higher burden of unpaid care and domestic work, and higher rates of domestic and intimate partner violence.³

Gender norms and roles also increase women’s exposure and vulnerability to disasters. Higher death rates among women and girls in many recent disasters have been attributed to gender inequalities including women’s limited access to information and risk communications, high poverty rates of women, and differential exposure to hazards due to gendered work and care roles. Although women tend to bear the brunt of gender inequalities, this does not always translate into worse disaster outcomes for women, with men accounting for more deaths in certain contexts due to their overrepresentation in rescue professions.⁴

KEY POINTS:

- Disasters are not experienced uniformly by everyone in society. Men and women, boys and girls, and people of diverse gender identities are affected differently by disasters, even if they live in the same household.⁶
- The vulnerability and exposure to disaster risk that disproportionately impacts women and girls is economically, socially and culturally constructed and can be reduced.⁷
- Effective disaster risk governance must consider the ways in which gender dynamics influence disaster impacts.
- When women’s capacities, knowledge and skills are utilized in disaster risk reduction efforts, we will all benefit.

In short - inadequate attention has been given to the ways in which gender inequality and disaster risk buttress each other, and how this synergy can more effectively be utilized to achieve gender equality and reduce disaster risk.

The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction outlines the inclusive, all-of-society approach that must be taken to reduce disaster risk. It acknowledges both the differentiated vulnerabilities that women and men face in disasters, how existing inequality fuels disaster risk, and the indispensable but often under-recognized role of women in risk reduction efforts. The Sendai Framework calls for the mobilization of

women's leadership in building resilience and recognizes that adequate capacity building measures must be taken to empower women for preparedness and to secure alternative means of livelihood in post-disaster situations.⁵ Yet not enough is being done in this regard.

We can accelerate progress towards achieving the mutually reinforcing goals of gender equality and the prevention and reduction of disaster risks by ensuring disaster risk reduction efforts are gender-responsive and promote and support women's empowerment and leadership.

THE CHALLENGES

1. The specific needs of women and girls are not prioritized in disaster risk reduction

Women are inadequately represented in disaster risk reduction leadership and decision-making meaning that the specific needs and risks faced by women, including sexual and reproductive health, and gender-based violence, are rarely prioritized. Despite the gendered impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, out of the 225 COVID-19 task forces in 137 countries only 4% have gender parity and 84% are dominated by men.⁸

2. Limited understanding of the gendered nature of disaster risk and insufficient disaggregated data means decision-making and priorities is not based on sound evidence

Insufficient sex, age and disability disaggregated data remains a significant barrier to understanding and analysing differential impacts and formulating gender-responsive and more inclusive disaster risk reduction programmes. The concept of data that is relevant to DRR needs to be understood more broadly to include information on existing gender inequality, economic information for recovery, and the extent of women's participation, empowerment and leadership roles.

3. Gender inequality is exacerbated by a lack of gender analysis in disaster and climate risk management

The lack of robust gender analysis informing disaster and climate risk management approaches means that strategies and policies can often unintentionally exacerbate gender inequalities, by adding to the unpaid care burden faced by women for example.

4. Investments in disaster risk reduction leave women behind

Investments in risk-informed development need to be radically scaled-up. However, the benefits of existing investments often do not reach women, and other marginalized groups. Women often hold a larger share of their assets in forms which are at greater risk of being lost during disasters, such as small livestock, food gardens, handicrafts and jewellery. Within the household these assets are also more likely to be sold to fund recovery which further entrenches women's economic disadvantage and influences their resilience to future disasters.⁹

¹ 'Achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes', Report of the Secretary-General, E/CN.6/2022/3

² 'Policy Brief: Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change', UNDRR 2021

³ 'Learning from COVID-19 to strengthen gender-responsive disaster risk reduction', UNDRR 2021

⁴ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/disasterriskmanagement/publication/gender-dynamics-of-disaster-risk-and-resilience>

⁵ Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030

⁶ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/disasterriskmanagement/publication/gender-dynamics-of-disaster-risk-and-resilience>

⁷ 'Towards Gender Equality and Women's Leadership for Resilience to Disaster Risks in Latin America and the Caribbean', Regional Consultation prior to the sixty-sixth session of the Commission on the Status of Women

⁸ UN Women and UNDP COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker

⁹ <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/35202/Gender-Dimensions-of-Disaster-Risk-and-Resilience-Existing-Evidence.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Address structural gender inequality as an underlying driver of risk in DRR laws, policies, programmes and governance

- Include gender equality and non-discrimination as policy objectives in climate, environmental and disaster risk management laws, policies and programmes.
- National and local policies and standards must be developed to build long-term multi-hazard risk reduction capacities. When recovering from a disaster the “building back better” principle must be understood not only as an opportunity for DRR, but also to address and transform underlying inequalities. Establishing and improving national and local monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to measure country performance on gender-responsive efforts in the implementation of the Sendai Framework will help measure progress.
- Institutionalize representation and meaningful participation of women and their organizations in climate, environmental and disaster risk governance institutions. While gender parity does not guarantee gender responsive programming, the participation of a critical mass of women in staffing, leadership and governing bodies is a significant enabler for this to occur.
- Ensure that all risk information, including early warning, is inclusive and accessible to all and impact-based for better understanding. Communities should have easy access to information on disaster risks, associated impacts, and the cost of inaction, to better appreciate the impact of their actions.
- Incorporating a gender perspective into DRR should not only be done at the level of regions or national states. Urban planning needs to address gender inequality in order to promote more resilient, safer and inclusive cities.

2. Identify and remove barriers and promote sex-disaggregated disaster data reporting

- Demonstrate the application of disaggregated data for inclusive planning to shift norms and expectations around sex-disaggregated data collection, analysis and reporting on Sendai Framework targets, so that it is no longer considered ‘optional’ and reported by few countries, but ‘expected’ and reported by most.
- Address continuing barriers to the availability of gender data in each country context, including wider systems issues such as linkages between subnational and national data collection systems, and make available the required investments to enable this.
- Ensure women lead and participate in the collection and use of disaggregated disaster and climate data. Consolidate data collected by a range of actors on disaster risk reduction and gender equality, to better understand disaster risks, exposure and vulnerability, and improve transparency by making relevant and current data accessible and usable to inform policy and guide decision making and investments.

3. Deepen understanding of the root causes of vulnerability and the gendered nature of risk

- Invest in examining the root causes of disaster risks, and gender-related exposure and vulnerability, analysing gender norms, roles, responsibilities and relations to identify actions to reduce gender-differential disaster risk. This should include both quantitative and qualitative socio-economic data as the basis for gender analysis to plan effective disaster risk reduction.
- Recognize diversity and the ways in which multiple and intersecting identities overlap to create an individual's unique risk profile. Women and girls, people living with disabilities, children and elderly are not a homogenous group of ‘vulnerable people’.
- Measure the impacts of programming on gender equality and women's empowerment in climate change, disaster and environmental risk governance. This would improve the feedback information to show what is working and what is not, and so to adjust policies, programming, resources and implementation capacity to be more effective in improving gender equality and women's empowerment.

4. Increase investment in gender-responsive disaster and climate risk management

- Fulfil pledges for an equitable division of climate finance to support mitigation and risk-informed adaptation action. Gender and risk tagging and tracking of budgetary and expenditure flows enable a clearer understanding of how much countries ought to spend, which areas are being prioritised, and better measurement of gender-responsive risk reduction and adaptation approaches. Gender-responsive financing strategies are required to implement national and local DRR strategies, climate adaptation plans and risk-informed development strategies.
- Shock-responsive social protection acts as an effective vehicle to implement a range of adaptation and disaster risk reduction programmes. While adaptive social protection programmes can effectively anticipate and prevent shocks from transforming into crises, less than half of the global population are effectively covered by at least one social protection benefit.¹⁰ Such initiatives must be universal, in light of the need to address the social protection gaps in the informal sector that often increase the vulnerabilities faced by women who are usually overrepresented in the informal economy.
- Investments in resilient infrastructure systems need to be informed by comprehensive gender and risk assessment to ensure they do not create or exacerbate gender inequality and future risks.
- Climate and disaster risk analytics need to better account for inequitable and systemic risks, knock-on impacts, and the medium to long term effects of various climate scenarios. Cost-benefit analyses must integrate a gender analysis into the projected costs of future disaster impacts, recognizing under- and unpaid care burden disproportionately carried by women.
- Invest resources to strengthen capacities in gender responsive disaster risk reduction and enhance collaboration among diverse stakeholders across the sectors at the national and local level. A greater proportion of resources should be made available directly to grassroots women's organizations in support of women as agents of change.

5. Strengthen women's economic empowerment and resilience

- Policies should value, reward, reduce and redistribute unpaid care and domestic work, recognizing the ways such work is exacerbated during disasters, and unpaid care and domestic workers should participate in policy dialogues.
- Mobilize and sustain financial resources, promote decent work, secure land and property rights, ensure access to education and training, and support technological and digital development to support women's resilience to disasters.
- Women's advancement and participation in the workforce, particularly in science, technology, engineering and mathematics fields where there are still significant gender parity gaps, will also help support diverse leadership in reducing disaster risk.
- Social protection mechanisms and financial stimulus packages need to include women-led micro, small and medium enterprises.
- Disaster risk financing, insurance and climate change funds must be gender-responsive and accessible to women.
- Post COVID-19 stimulus packages should catalyse greener economic growth, eliminate fossil fuel subsidies, avoid environmental deregulation, and address key disaster risk drivers.
- Social protection acts as an effective vehicle to implement a range of adaptation and disaster risk reduction programmes. Such initiatives should be shock-responsive and universal to reduce vulnerabilities, provide income protection, and act as a mechanism for ex-ante relief assistance.
- Financing instruments and layered financing mechanisms should be scaled-up to enhance preventive and anticipatory actions.
- Partnership with the private sector should be leveraged to co-develop innovative financial instruments, including to manage residual risk e.g., through bonds, insurance products and other contingent financing mechanisms. Incentives and regulatory mechanisms should catalyse action and accelerate investment pathways as part of a transition to low carbon, resilient economies.

6. Promote and support women's full and equal participation and leadership in disaster risk reduction at all levels

- Foster rural women's economic empowerment and access and control over productive resources that enables their engagement in sustainable food production and provides resilience against climate and disaster risks.
- Ensure women are involved in the design, management, resourcing and implementation of gender-responsive disaster risk reduction policies, plans and programmes.
- Recognize women's diverse knowledge, skills and capacities, ensuring they are supported and invested in.
- Strengthen the resilience of women and girls to climate and disaster risk by financing and provision of sustainable infrastructure, accelerating access to decentralized renewable energy and safe fuel, and increased access to public services, adaptive social protection and social safety nets, and decent work for women.

¹⁰ https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS_817572/lang-en/index.htm