



*After the 2004 Asia quake and tsunamis these women on Simeulue Island, Indonesia had to rebuild their lives.  
Photo: Australian Red Cross/Hotli Simanjuntak*

## Overview

This briefing paper looks at the importance of gender within Red Cross disaster management and offers some suggestions about how Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies might integrate gender into programs and strategies.

This paper can be used as a tool during gender training, as an information sheet for staff and volunteers, at the governance level, and as part of education or advocacy activities within a Society.

## Gender: an integral part of disaster management

Gender shapes the extent to which men, women, boys and girls are vulnerable to and affected by emergencies and disasters.

Studies have shown that disasters generally accentuate existing gender inequalities. They also have the potential to alter the division of labour, mainly through changes in households.

Disasters and emergencies can also present opportunities (good

and bad) for a change in gender roles.

Gender affects the kinds of responses that are feasible in different communities and societies. Understanding that men and women face different obstacles can help the development of more effective programs and ensure that needs are really met.

Taking a gendered perspective can highlight opportunities and resources that support reconstruction and recovery efforts.

Women as well as men are an important resource in delivering assistance, establishing peace and rebuilding societies.



*After the 2009 Pacific tsunami in Samoa and Tonga destroyed their home, Vaalele and his family began the rebuilding process. Photo: Australian Red Cross/Abril Esquivel*

## Vulnerability in conflicts, emergencies and disasters

### Women

Women face unique vulnerabilities during and after conflicts, emergencies and disasters including:

- Rape and violence as a systematic weapon of war - women can be exposed to sexual assault, trafficking and violence during emergencies.
- Vulnerability to HIV because of sexual violence. Women are also more likely to contract HIV from partners returning from conflict zones or work away from home.
- Extensive care giving responsibilities.
- Discrimination against women not in conventional families, such as widows, single mothers and single women.

- Women who have suffered abuse may be rejected by their communities, leaving them without protection, housing, social and economic support.
- When men are away seeking work or involved in armed conflict, women often take on the additional burden of men's work.
- Women are more likely to be affected by natural disasters because they tend to be in or near their homes at the time.
- Women's reproductive needs mean they have increased health vulnerabilities during emergencies when normal health services are likely to be limited.
- Male dominance of the public, political, social and economic spheres, i.e. women are more economically insecure than men.
- Ideological constraints on female mobility, such as restrictive clothing.

### Men

Men face their own vulnerabilities during and after conflicts, emergencies and disasters, including:

- In armed combat, or as civilians, men are often at the frontline of a conflict situation and are more likely to be killed or physically attacked.
- During emergency situations there is likely to be growing violence among men.
- Men are often expected to play leadership roles within their families and communities which can impact psychological wellbeing.
- Men are more likely to leave home to seek work following a disaster.
- When men are away from home they are often at increased risk of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV.
- Physical disability affects both men and women, but men may be severely and permanently physically disabled because of their role in armed combat. This has long term implications for their physical and mental wellbeing.
- As relief efforts tend to target vulnerable women and children, groups of vulnerable men may be overlooked.
- Young men may be targeted for recruitment to the military.

## A closer look at gender and disaster management

Considering the position of both women and men is critical to developing successful and sustainable solutions:

Men and conflicts, disasters and emergencies	Women and conflicts, disasters and emergencies
Men have more freedom to travel and have access to information about an emergency situation (as a result of mobility, language skills and access to TV/radio).	Women are likely to be reliant on word of mouth due to a lack of literacy, limited access to TV/radio and the inability to travel outside their community. This raises the risk that they will be exposed to distorted verbal messages about an emergency.
Men may be without the support of their family and community.	Female-headed households are likely to increase.
Vulnerable male populations may miss out on necessary services and provisions.	Women are usually the primary group to receive emergency food and services.
Men are usually put in charge of decisions about how and when services will be provided.	Women are generally responsible for feeding and caring for family members, but have little say in the planning of emergency or disaster preparedness programs.
Men are more likely to experience physical disability and severe emotional trauma as a result of armed conflict.	Women are likely to experience trauma because of loss of security, and sexual and physical violence.
When men travel away from their home and family, they often become responsible for their own cooking and cleaning.	If husbands or sons are missing or injured, women may take on men's work, and lose the physical protection that men can provide.
	The increase in employment opportunities that can arise during a disaster response phase are less accessible to women due to family demands and/or cultural limitations.
	Women are restricted in their ability to travel because of children, social restrictions on their movement, fear of abuse and lack of transportation.



Photo: Australian Red Cross/Mel Tolnay

### Making gender work

Here are some suggestions for incorporating gender into your disaster management planning:

#### Gender analysis

Gender analysis should focus on both men and women. A gendered response also recognises that a range of factors cause inequalities between men and women. Around the world these inequalities can result in women having less access to resources, assistance and power within society.

Gender sensitive programs respond to the different needs and experiences of men and women in conflict, disasters and emergencies but they also address the issues and structures that result in women being disadvantaged and disempowered.

## Planning and assessment

- Ensure both men and women are represented on assessment teams.
- Include both men and women in the sample population being assessed.
- Ensure that data is disaggregated by gender (i.e. broken down) during collection and analysis to improve targeting of programs and assistance, such as:
  - access to, and content of, food baskets and sanitation needs
  - access to water
  - registration requirements, logistics and distribution points
  - data for information, education and communications materials.

- Where culturally appropriate, interview men and women separately as they may not always speak freely in front of each other.
- Ensure interviews recognise men and women's different work schedules. For example, do not schedule a village meeting at times when women are usually preparing meals.
- Identify and address the constraints that stop women's participation, such as childcare, domestic duties, distance and cultural constraints.

### Vulnerability capacity assessment

To be sensitive to gender differences, a Vulnerability Capacity Assessment (VCA) should ask:

- What are the different coping strategies of men and women?
- What are the specific needs of women and men?
- What are the conditions or factors that increase the disaster resilience of women and men?
- What is the impact of a disaster on the economic status of men and women?
- What are the roles taken on by men and women during emergencies and are any of these non-traditional?
- Are planning and assessment activities equally reaching women and men?
- What are the employment and work patterns of women and men, their work skills and organisational networks?



*Natural disasters hit hard in the vast terrain of Papua New Guinea.  
Photo: Australian Red Cross/Jerry Galea*



*Photo: IFRC/Sharilyn Amy*

- What kinds of associations, cooperatives and advocacy groups may be able to assist vulnerable groups such as disabled women, older women, migrants and women maintaining households?
- Is there any potential for partnering with women's organisations, environmental groups, grassroots advocacy organisations, and other community-based women's groups? Such groups have local knowledge, community languages, social networks and insight into community history.
- Are there any cultural practices which may adversely affect one group (i.e. enforced widow marriage)?
- Promote girls leadership in school-based disaster risk reduction exercises.

### **Gender sensitive disaster preparedness**

Here are some suggestions for including gender in disaster preparedness:

- Run first aid training sessions with Red Cross volunteers aimed at women.
- Ensure that in community disaster response teams and on community-based disaster committees, both men and women are represented.
- Involve entire families, not just the heads of households, to discuss community contingency plans, family preparedness plans, and delicate socio-cultural issues, such as decision-making roles and issues about restrictive dress.

### **Gender sensitive disaster interventions**

Emergency communications about hazards and prevention need to be gender-specific and use different media to reach both women and men.

Men may have greater access to TV/radios and higher literacy rates so media campaigns often direct information to men.

For women, information may need to be channelled through their informal communication networks. Alternatively pictorial or theatrical presentations may be useful.

Women's access to relief services is often restricted by differences in:

- social power (race, class, caste, citizenship status)
- social esteem (women living with HIV, widows, lesbians, homeless women)
- physical mobility (mental and/or physical disabilities, lack of transportation, seclusion)
- responsibilities for child care and care of other family members.

Programs should include provision for gender-specific needs, including:

- appropriate clothing and hygiene supplies
- safe transportation
- childcare in relief centres
- reproductive health services and anti-violence services.

Traditional work patterns must also be recognised to avoid further disempowering disaster survivors. This can happen when women are excluded from food distribution roles in temporary accommodation and refugee camps.

Women relief workers need to be employed along with men. Women staff are usually able to talk more freely with other women and discuss their needs, and there are fewer cultural constraints to visiting women in their homes.

Gender analysis and gender sensitive strategies need to be integrated into the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of post-disaster employment projects. It is essential, for example, to ensure that women and men have equal opportunities for income earning.



*Photo: Australian Red Cross/Li Feng*

## Management and training

### Responsibilities

It is the program coordinator and/or team leader's responsibility to report on and plan gender sensitive strategies and gender responsibilities should be included in the position descriptions of all team members.

### Tools

Develop easy-to-use and relevant tools to support staff and volunteers. Adapt and use existing tools from the web.

### Reporting

Make information collection tools and reporting formats gender sensitive. While it is unlikely that gender information will be collected in initial appeal documentation, gender disaggregated data can be included in the revised appeal and in the regional assistance/country assistance strategy.

Project formats for an annual appeal should also specify that gender aspects of the project be explained.

## Training

Develop a separate training program on gender and integrate gender across all training programs.

Use the Federation CD Rom *Training Pack on Gender Issues* and other suitable tools (Australian Red Cross International Program has these resources).

Sometimes it can be useful to use an experienced gender trainer to help develop a tailored training program and/or to modify existing materials.

## Recruitment

Recruit both men and women as staff and volunteers. Gender sensitive recruitment should be part of an overall strategy - not only to ensure gender balance - but also so that staff and volunteers have an understanding of and sensitivity to gender issues.

This may involve undertaking community forums to explain why both men and women are needed for programs, and recruiting in alternative ways, (i.e. hiring people without literacy skills - in some communities this is most often women - if the role doesn't require literacy).

## Further reading

Information for this paper has been drawn from web articles and the following publications:

*Gender in Disaster Response: Phase One Report*, Kirstine Drew, Women and Development Unit International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Geneva, Aug 2000.

*Working with Women at Risk: Practical Guidelines for Assessing Local Disaster Risk*, E Enarson et al, International Hurricane Centre, Florida International University, June 2003.

*Mainstreaming Gender in the Humanitarian Response*, Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Working Group, Rome 22-23 April 1999.

*Summary Guidelines and Checklist for Integrating Gender Analysis and Assessment*, Interagency Workshop on Integration of Gender into Needs Assessment and Planning of Humanitarian Assistance, Inter-Agency Standing Committee.

*Training Pack on Gender Issues in the Work of the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies* (CD Rom), Geneva, 2002

## Web search

There is a wide range of reading and tools on the web.

These are constantly being updated and added to and here are some suggested key words to get started:

- Gender equality and humanitarian assistance
- Gender and emergencies
- Gender and disasters
- Gender and war
- Online forum, gender, emergencies and disasters

