



GenderCC Statement on International Day for Disaster Reduction: Bringing gender-sensitive disaster risk reduction to the grassroots level

As the majority of the world's poor, women are affected differently by disasters than men. Differences in socio-economic and cultural circumstance often mean increased vulnerability and longer-term disadvantage for women following a disaster. The growing impact of climate change-related disasters is thus of immense concern. Yet, at the same time, women and girls have a crucial role to play in disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation, particularly at a grassroots level. As a result, GenderCC welcomes the focus on women and girls as the "(in)visible force of resilience" in the context of the recent 2012 International Day for Disaster Reduction.

Women face restricted access to the resources that are essential in disaster preparedness, mitigation and rehabilitation. Forecasting information networks or early warning systems often fail to take into account women's limited mobility and channels to access information. Accordingly, women are less able to minimise risks. In the aftermath of a disaster, they are directly impacted in their role as providers of basic needs for the household. Fetching fuel and water, harvesting and preparing food, or taking care of ill or injured family members and children often takes priority over earning an income. Without disaster preparedness or effective coping mechanisms, the increased domestic and economic burden placed on women can have long-term consequences, particularly for gender equality.

Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), including disaster mitigation, early warning systems, preparedness and recovery response, can significantly decrease the risk and defenselessness of vulnerable groups. In 2005, the World Conference on Disaster Reduction (WCDR) created the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) identifying five priorities for action, including DRR. The HFA recognizes gender as an important category and encourages the integration of a gender perspective in all steps of disaster management. Highlighting the role of women and providing them with the right skills to prepare for disasters, as well as recovery or coping tools, is of benefit to the entire family and community.

Despite this, the central role that women play in the response to disaster is often overlooked. As important participants to the prevention of and reaction to disasters, women contribute to rebuilding the damaged environment, building shelter, gathering food and water and tending to the needs of their family and community, as well as mobilising networks. In actual fact, disasters can also provide women with unique opportunities to challenge and change gender discrimination in society.

GenderCC strongly believes that the use of a gender lens should be mainstreamed into DRR processes. According to GenderCC member and disaster expert Maria Zahur, "any DRR initiative lacking the proactive involvement of women will fail to achieve optimal results".

Through various initiatives worldwide, GenderCC has learned that the progress to-date on gender and DRR mechanisms has mainly revolved around policy and institutional changes. The next crucial step is to take the debate to the grassroots level by a) identifying disaster risk indicators and early warning systems, analyzing the social/political/economic contextual realities of the hazard prone zones, b) preparing operational guidelines and their institutionalization, c) nurturing a cadre of local women leadership and d) sensitization and support to the relevant local stakeholders including women.

[GenderCC](#) is global network of organisations, experts and activists working for gender equality, women's rights and climate justice. GenderCC is working on gender issues in the DRR processes worldwide, with the conviction that new ways of thinking about disaster risk are needed. A greater reflection of the differences between women's and men's everyday realities will promote an integrated and holistic approach and enhance community involvement, mitigation, disaster prevention and social equality.

Maira Zahur has been a member of the [Gender & Disaster Network](#), as well as of GenderCC, for many years. Maira recently founded the Social Research Initiative (SRI) in Pakistan which aims at fostering research on the social dimensions of climate change. SRI is a voluntary group of DRR practitioners is working to enhance networking and coordination to bring out the grassroots realities around DRR.