

# Understanding Intersectionality in Women Led Disaster Preparedness and Resilience



Photo: AIDMI.



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## INTRODUCTION

# Understanding Intersectionality in Women Led Disaster Preparedness and Resilience in South Asia

By *Mihir R. Bhatt*, AIDMI, Ahmedabad, India

Intersectionality of risk, resilience and gender cannot be understood without recognising that disasters affect men and women differently and it is women at the lowest level who have been leading the recovery process for the longest time.. This is what AIDMI has found since its 2004 tsunami response in India, Maldives, and Sri Lanka with local organisations of women. And it is also found that increasingly the women are differently affected by age, occupation, social position, income levels, work, and ownership of assets.

Disasters are often seen to be great levelers as they unleash indiscriminate death, destruction and distress in the areas they hit. May that be desert of Kutch where AIDMI is working with reopening schools during the pandemic to understanding uncertainties faced by local women leaders in the delta of Sunderbans in India and Bangladesh. However, in reality the

impacts of disasters are not equally distributed. In fact, the vulnerability and exposure to disasters risks depends on a variety of social and economic factors. For instance, women and girls suffer greater and more lingering impacts of disasters and climate extremes as compared to men and boys. Women suffer greater loss of livelihood than men in India and Bangladesh delta. Women are more likely to drop out of social protection during disaster and following recovery than men in Himalayas. This 'differentiated vulnerability' to disasters is driven by the gender inequalities caused by socioeconomic conditions, cultural beliefs, and traditional practices.<sup>1</sup>

Across many countries, entrenched patriarchy and power imbalances limits the access of women to resources and opportunities making women highly vulnerable to disaster and climate extremes. However, gender alone is just one dimension of the 'differentiated vulnerability'.<sup>2</sup> It

is crucial to note that the interplay of gender along with race, religion, ethnicity, economic status, class, caste and sexual orientation drives a person's vulnerability and exposure to disasters. This 'inter-connectedness' or overlap of highly complex social processes is called as 'intersectionality'. And AIDMI has found that social processes are part of economic processes as well as they shape economic processes such as income and work. The intersectionality of risk, resilience and gender needs to be better understood and articulated in order to drive action for meaningful and sustainable disaster risk reduction (DRR) outcomes. AIDMI has also found that more women lead action to control wild fires in high altitudes in India and Nepal; more women care about birds and other living beings in their farms and fields and plantations in India and Pakistan; and more women take efforts to address healing of coastal ecosystems

## ABOUT THIS ISSUE

This issue of Southasiadisasters.net is titled 'Understanding Intersectionality in Women led Disaster Preparedness and Resilience' and highlights the interplay of risk, resilience and gender. It seeks to highlight the concept of 'differentiated vulnerability' to disasters and extreme events as experienced by women and girls as compared to boys and men. Social divisions of race, religion, ethnicity, economic status, class, caste and sexual orientation also drive a person's vulnerability and exposure to disasters. Intersectionality or the overlap of complex social processes determines an individual's vulnerability as well as adaptive capacity to a disaster or extreme event.

This issue tires to highlight this theme of intersectionality by providing a snapshot of the good practices, research, policy and grassroots interventions in promoting women's leadership and agency in disaster risk reduction (DRR) in India and beyond. ■

- **Kshitij Gupta**, AIDMI

<sup>1</sup> Gender Equality, GFDRR. <https://www.gfdrr.org/en/genderequality>

<sup>2</sup> Erman, Alvina; De Vries Robbe, Sophie Anne; Thies, Stephan Fabian; Kabir, Kayenat; Maruo, Mirai. 2021. Gender Dimensions of Disaster Risk and Resilience: Existing Evidence. World Bank, Washington, DC. © World Bank. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/35202> License: CC BY 3.0 IGO.



in India and Sri Lanka, negotiating their intersectionality.

While the enhanced vulnerability of women to disaster risks is acknowledged at the policy level, the role of women in disaster preparedness and resilience building barely finds any mention. Women leaders, especially from at-risk and marginalized communities have also risen up to be agents of change in addressing disaster risk and building community resilience. For example, women members of Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) have become beacons of hope and resilience in their own communities by undertaking various livelihood activities that have brought aspects of peace, prosperity and resilience to many external shocks. Similarly, women leaders of CARITAS in Bihar and Odisha and of ADRA in refugee camps in Tamil Nadu also took a decisive leadership role as 'frontline warriors' in India's fight against the COVID-19 pandemic as several women doctors, nurses, aganwadi workers, ANMs and police personnel facilitated awareness building, patient care and vaccine administration.

Thus, understanding the intersectionality of women led disaster preparedness and resilience can help in leveraging women's voice, leadership, and agency for

resilience. AIDMI has found that it helps women organise across markets; draw cover of social protection; and build mutual capacities. In order to accomplish this, we need certain basic minimum requirements in humanitarian and development action. Firstly, there is a need to institutionalize the systematic collection, use and reporting of gender data. Secondly, it is essential to develop gender responsive laws, strategies, policies and plans. Thirdly, increasing financial resources and allocation for gender responsive actions is extremely important as it would help embed gendered approaches to DRR in the various response and preparedness mechanisms and partnerships in the larger humanitarian landscape. Most importantly, we need to promote women's leadership in DRR through legal and policy framework, political will, organizational culture, accountability and responsibility, technical capacity, and adequate resources. And in addition this leadership needs to be protected from uncertainties of changing climate, both, top-down and bottom-up that women face.

Changing climate is already undermining South Asia's food and water security, AIDMI has found in its work with IDS, UK and IIT Mumbai while understanding the

uncertainty faced by local leaders including women. It is women farmer's hard work and agricultural productivity and her social and mental determination that slows down or in rare cases steps undermining of food and water security.

AIDMI has invariably seen in the field that when victim women are given a chance they do come up and ahead to take the lead, with modesty and grace, a bit slow but in sustained manner, and aim at taking everyone - family to community - along the resilient recovery path. **That is, the women, given a chance, turn their intersectionality as an asset for resilience building at the local level where it matters the most. Similarly, women can, given a chance, turn their intersectionality to their advantage to transform the institutions and organisations that they form and run.** How do women do this? Under what conditions? What works? And what is likely to fail? It is the list of these questions that attracts AIDMI's attention and time in South Asia.

The above are some of the normative prescriptions that can help in improving women's enhanced vulnerability to disasters and help them further evolve as effective and credible agents of resilience building in South Asia. ■



*Training on Women Led Disaster Preparedness, Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India.*

## The Pandemic Has Pushed Women Out of Work: These Policies Can Help<sup>3</sup>

By Sameer Khatiwada, Social Sector Specialist (ICT), Southeast Asia Department, ADB; and Souleima El Achkar-Hilal, Economist and Labor Market Information Specialist

In Southeast Asia, women workers were disproportionately affected by the pandemic. Urgent policy action is needed to address the issue and improve the welfare of women in other areas as well.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had devastating impacts on labor markets worldwide and Southeast Asia is no exception. Although both men and women were hit hard, the greater impact on women must be well understood and to explicitly targeted them in policies aiming at improving labor markets and people's lives in the post-pandemic era.

According to our research, the disproportionate impact on women is most evident in the area of job losses. At the height of the COVID-19 impact on labor markets in the second quarter of 2020, women represented approximately 91% of manufacturing job losses and 58% of overall job losses in Thailand.

Beyond job losses however, the differential impact was reflected in far more labor force exits among women, in all our sample countries and across nearly all ages, while men were more likely to become unemployed. This means that in contrast to men, most women who had lost their jobs were not searching for work and/or were not available to take up work.



Women in Southeast Asia were more likely to lose their jobs during the pandemic than men. Photo: ADB.

Labor force survey data suggest that labor force exits among women were mainly temporary, and at least as many women re-entered the labor market in the second half of 2020 as those who had left in the first half of the year.

However, a close look reveals that many women who re-entered the labor market did so into 'lower quality' jobs than they had prior to the crisis, often informal, own-account or contributing family work. This is indicative of an 'added worker effect' or 'distress employment' whereby additional family members join the labor force to compensate for lost household income.

It reflects the fact that many low-income households in these countries – in a context of weak social protection and without savings to draw upon – cannot afford to stay without employment income for long. We should ensure that these female workers do not remain 'trapped' in lower quality forms of work, which would represent significant disruptions to their working lives, including potential 'scarring effects' for young labor market entrants.

The disproportionate impact on women reflected in their share of job losses is largely related to their sector of employment, and their occupations. In much of Southeast Asia, there

<sup>3</sup> Asian Development Blog, Published: 10 February 2022, <https://blogs.adb.org/blog/pandemic-has-pushed-women-out-work-these-policies-can-help>

remains a significant amount of gender segregation in employment.

Manufacturing – hit hard by the pandemic through supply chain disruptions and declines in global demand – constitutes an important source of female employment, and particularly of wage and salaried work in the region. However, much of this employment remains in lower value-added industries, where wages and productivity – although generally higher than in agriculture and low-skilled services – remain low.

In particular, many workers along global supply chains have temporary contracts, and informal employment remains elevated even within formal enterprises. As a result, they have high levels of job insecurity and limited access to social protection. This compounds the vulnerability of workers in these occupations at high risk from automation.

In the services sector, large shares of the region’s female workforce are in middle-skilled sales and service occupations and low-skilled elementary occupations, which were heavily affected by containment measures and mobility restrictions, and by the decline in aggregate demand and tourism.

In these occupations, physical proximity is key and few tasks can be undertaken remotely. Conversely, with the exceptions of health care and education, female employment in higher skilled services and in the professional and associate professional occupational categories remains limited in the region.

Beyond sectoral and occupational segregation are gender-specific

The pandemic has painfully highlighted the vulnerability of women in Southeast Asia’s workforce.

barriers to female labor force participation, often rooted in social and cultural norms with respect to gender roles. As schools closed and the health emergency was maintained, women exited the labor market en masse to take care of children and ill relatives. The ‘care burden’ fell more heavily on women, along with its associated trade-offs as women transitioned from paid work outside the home, to unpaid care work within their households.

The pandemic has painfully highlighted the vulnerability of women in Southeast Asia’s workforce, and the growing inequalities across workers, based on skills and the nature of their working arrangements, among other dimensions. As technology and other factors continue to drive these inequalities, improving women’s access to decent work would have substantial spill over effects for societies and economies.

As countries develop their post-COVID recovery strategies, both demand- and supply-side hurdles to the expansion of decent work for women must be addressed.

On the demand side, labor force activation measures and employment creation incentives must target women. On the supply side, women’s access to economic and productive resources and to skills development (including reskilling and

upskilling in digital and technical areas) must be expanded.

Barriers to female labor force participation must be dismantled, through investing in family support services, and improving legal and institutional frameworks to tackle social norms that discriminate against women, eliminate gender-based violence, protect women’s rights, and recognize, reduce and redistribute unpaid care and domestic work.

Additionally, social protection has a key role to play: as women face numerous disruptions to their working lives, life-cycle programs and policies (including maternity benefits, unemployment insurance) can help limit these impacts. All of these constitute elements of the SDG 5 (gender equality) of the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).



Another critical issue is how climate change affects men and women differently. With the strong impetus building to make post-pandemic recovery pathways green, there may be several opportunities to have a positive impact on both women and climate.

While the pandemic has cast a spotlight on persistent labor market challenges faced by women worldwide, it has also opened a window of opportunity to make decisive policy changes in many other areas as well that benefit women. It is time for policymakers and communities to take action. ■



# Role of Government of India in Women's Leadership Support in Disaster Recovery

By Ashwin Srivastava, CEO, Sapio Analytics, Atal Innovation Mission, NITI Aayog, India

Recently, while helping to create policies for the Government of Uttar Pradesh, we evaluated certain benefits of driving the said policies with support from women citizen leadership. The resulting perceived benefits showed better possibility of on-ground execution through involvement of women at the forefront, particularly in the context of empathy driven localised impact.

When it comes to disaster recovery, the need to drive leadership with care and empathy is critical. It is important that multiple complex parameters are considered while executing the right decisions needed for such recovery. Hence, the said evaluation of women leadership makes the need of women's leadership support in disaster recovery even more prominent.

Atal Innovation Mission, by NITI Aayog, has promoted the involvement of women in driving an innovative mind-set in India, through Atal Tinkering Labs (ATLs) and Atal Incubation Centres. The current gender distribution of ATL In-charges across India (numbers

derived based on a secondary evaluation, through unofficial checks with various ATL mentors) show a favourable number for women. Hence, there is a possibility to use this workforce towards significant actions in the context of disaster management.

## Program led by Women Teachers

The ATL In-charges are academicians and teachers with the responsibility to promote innovations amongst students. They are shaping young minds towards creating practical products that can be brought into regular usage with some professional guidance.

If the children of India are ready to provide technology based preventive support in disaster recovery, the impact of disasters is expected to be low, and the recovery can be expected to be faster. A program, that is led by the women ATL In-charge, owing to the leadership benefits mentioned above, can help achieve this.

This program is proposed to create special call for action to create

technology driven solutions used in disaster recovery, with clear case studies and step-wise guidance provided by industry experts. The women leaders shall be expected to deliver upon successful creation of these technologies, as part of their existing roles with Atal Tinkering Labs, but with an additional focus on the vision of such a program. These technologies shall then be shortlisted for practical usage, and regular preparation of innovators for disaster recovery shall remain the responsibility of the shortlisted winning ATL In-charge leaders.

## Innovations by Women in STEM

This does not require any special program, as there are existing programs around promotion of innovations by women in the field of science and technology. What is additionally needed is involvement of these innovations for the purpose of disaster recovery.

This is proposed to work in two tracks: firstly, shortlist existing innovations by women leaders and find use cases of the same for disaster recovery, and secondly, create specific problem statements based on a data driven evaluation on the kind of innovations done by women in STEM to create specific solutions. These leaders can then be empanelled for further support in designing disaster recovery technologies through various government schemes.

## Women Leadership in Civil Defence

Civil Defence Professionals and Home Guards need to be on their toes when it comes to taking actions



File Photo of an Atal Tinkering Lab in Mumbai led by a Woman In-charge.

related to disaster recovery. We are also working on empowering them further through smart training sessions and added responsibilities of further training relevant citizens.

The above programs can be enhanced with women leadership focus. Women leaders amongst the civil defence professionals can be identified to train and empower more citizens, particularly women in

the education and healthcare spaces, to improve their capabilities for disaster recovery. As an example, climate changes are leading to significant changes and new types of disasters are getting created and are being anticipated. A deep knowledge of the same is needed, and must be driven through leading female voices in the society, to generate the right kind of impact. Such drive is possible with women leadership in civil defence at the fore.

For the above, the first program with ATL in-charge leaders can also have synergies, thus combining forces and increasing benefits.

Overall, by enhancing existing programs around disaster recovery or women empowerment, and in some cases by combining them, as well as by creating new programs around the concept, we can help create a stronger nation when it comes to disaster recovery. ■

#### DISASTER PREPAREDNESS THROUGH WOMEN'S LIVELIHOOD SECURITY

## Women Led Disaster Preparedness: Learnings from SEWA

By Mansi Shah, Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA), Gujarat, India

Women are the backbone of a poor informal workers' household. They not only shoulder the responsibility of fulfilling the family's food and nutritional needs as well as "Care" needs, but also financial responsibilities. And yet, due to their natural tendency of putting family first, women often are the most affected in any disaster situation.

SEWA, a national trade union of over 2.1 million poor self-employed women workers from the informal economy has been working relentlessly for almost 5 decades to organize these poor and vulnerable women workers for full employment and self-reliance. SEWA's experience has shown that whether they are affected by cyclone or earthquake, or the pandemic like the current, women demanded work. Women want to rebuild their lives and livelihoods through work and income security.

*"I am a landless laborer... a few years back I took training from SEWA to*

*become a hand-pump repair technician. During the current pandemic and lockdown... when the majority of informal worker's livelihoods had come to screeching halt... we had work in their hand, which brought us economic security and above all a peace of mind... initially I was afraid... On the one hand, we would all starve of hunger if I stop working... On the other, if I got COVID-19 and died, who would look after my children?... but then I thought... through my work I will be able to live a life with dignity, without begging and also reduce suffering of villagers who have no access to water.... So I underwent safety training, put on my mask and gloves and went to work. And when I saw the gratitude in the eyes of the villagers, I felt satisfied... it overrode my fear."... says Sushilaben, a grassroots hand-pump repair technician from Aravalli district in Gujarat.*

The story of Sushilaben is similar to that of thousands of poor grassroots women who look for dignity rather than charity. These women have shown that the key to disaster

recovery and resilience building is through a new kind of economic model that we call the "Economy of Nurturance" – a model that values the work of the worker, her relationship with the community, society as well as environment... An economy that understands that



human capital is inseparable from other forms of capital (community assets) and values the role of organizing as a key to unlocking the human capital potential.



And when we are looking at the human capital, it is also important to understand that some of the major challenges faced by these women workers from the informal sector are access to working capital that would help them to restore and resume economic activities; Growing Input Costs; Affordable access to new technology; traditionally gendered roles and access to skill development.

Therefore, there is a need to mainstream gender concerns in a constructive way that leads to economic models that do not create concentration of wealth in hands of few at the cost of many. Such economic models would promote and invest in the local decentralized economies. It would also facilitate improvements in financial, social and environmental aspects of the women's lives and livelihoods – including long term social impact in addition to the financial profits. Some of examples of these social

impacts are – an increase in the number of educated girls in the families and villages, increased respect, negotiating power of women workers in their homes, workplaces as well as community; increased assets in the name of women worker; reduction in rural out-migration etc.

And for the success of such an economic model, there is a need for Policies and design which are informal sector women worker centric and that promote Local and Decentralized Supply Chain model. There is also a need for an innovative financing mechanisms to facilitate formation and scaling of women-led microenterprises and supply chains – a fund which is a mixture of equity, grant, loan, patient capital etc., will look for moderate returns and help the women entrepreneurs/social enterprises to grow at a pace that is comfortable to the poor. We at SEWA call it the Livelihood Recovery and Resilience Fund. ■

#### WOMEN LEADERSHIP IN THE PANDEMIC

## Women Leadership in Cash Transfer in the Pandemic: ADRA Experience

By *Imran Majid*, Programs Officer, Adventist Development and Relief Agency India (ADRA India)

While the Cash Transfer programs are designed to alleviate poverty, they can also play a critical role in empowering the marginalised sections of the communities especially Women. Cash Transfer programs can improve the lives of women by providing them cash and control over it. It enables them the control and decision making around the expenditure of the cash. ADRA India implemented a similar project in three districts of Tamil Nadu providing unconditional cash transfers to the most marginalised

and vulnerable communities affected by the impacts of COVID-19.

ADRA India's assessment reveals that generally during a disaster, women and children, particularly female heads of household, the elderly, and pregnant and lactating women suffer the most due to cultural norms and lack of sufficient access to food. Due to COVID-19, most of the families have lost their income and most of the marginalised households still depend on raw food materials distributed by the public distribution system. Mostly children

are given more importance while distributing the food in the family. Then the men consume food and women generally consume the leftovers by children and men in the family. Most of the families have restricted the food intake for two meals per day than three meals. The team also found that both the quantity and the quality of the food intake reduced a lot, especially among the women. Lactating and pregnant women faced a major challenge because of the lack of food. According to the World Development Report (WDR) 2012,



gender is defined as socially constructed norms and ideologies which determine the behavior and actions of men and women. Understanding these gender relations and the power dynamics behind them is a prerequisite for understanding individuals' access to and distribution of resources, the ability to make decisions and the way women and men, boys and girls are affected by political processes and social development. One of the objectives of this intervention is to understand the gender dynamics among the affected communities and contribute towards the achievement of gender equality. Hence the project undertook gender analysis among the affected communities.

In most of the families, men are the breadwinners for the family, thus holding a stake in taking the decisions over the spending of money. To transform gender balance at the household level, ADRA India prioritises women as the primary project participants in its Unconditional Cash Transfer programs. It also prioritises women in the leadership roles in the village level committees which boosts their confidence to participate in the community level decision making.

- Prioritizing women as project participants, helps the project to create awareness among community members, especially among the men and boys to acknowledge the differences between women and men, based on the unequal distribution of resources, opportunities, constraints, and power.
- The formation of village level committees under the leadership of women helps the project to ensure the direct participation and role of women in selection of deserving



- participants and decision making. In addition, organizing focus group discussions and receiving feedback from women on the project implementation and progress, especially in the presence of men gives them the confidence and makes them think/feel that they too can contribute positively for the development of their community in the future.
- Besides, the conscious decision to register women as participants, helps not just to avoid the risk of cash being misused, but also contribute monetarily for the welfare of the family and make women feel confident about it.
- Also, by following gender integrating strategies such as promoting women's participation through village level Committees, involving women where possible in the targeting process, and putting security measures in place so that women feel safe and protected in accessing or receiving the cash, the projects can minimize the barriers to women in accessing project benefits.

- Anecdotal evidence from ADRA India's project strongly suggest that gender dynamics have changed for the better in households that benefit from these Projects.
- Gender strategies in the village level committees have given women the confidence to voice out their opinions and mobilize other women in the community towards the community development initiatives vis-a-vis tanking up small entrepreneur activities such as making lunch bags, needle work, tailoring, etc.

Integration of gender strategies not only include engaging women but also including men in the intervention areas. Engaging men to allow women participation and encouraging women decision making remains the integral part of the gender inclusion/ gender integration strategies in the cash transfer program implementation. Also, the key to achieving women's leadership is the awareness of youth (boys & girls) on the gender roles in community development and better management of cash transfer programs is central to successful program implementation. ■

## CASE STUDY

# Women's Leadership in Conserving Nature: The Case for Eco-Safe Roads in Nepal through Nature-based Solutions

By Anu Adhikari, Senior Programme Officer (Climate Change, Gender and Social Inclusion), IUCN Nepal

Nepal is one of the most disaster-prone (20<sup>th</sup>) countries in the world due to its topography and climatic conditions. It is exposed to many natural hazards and human induced disasters. Ecosystems and more than 80 percent of the total population of Nepal are at the risk of multiple natural hazards, such as floods, landslides, drought, windstorms, hailstorms, fires, earthquakes, epidemics and Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs). Landslide is the most common natural hazards in the hilly regions of Nepal (DRR portal, 2021). In the year 2021, 673 people lost their lives, 69 people went missing and 181 people were injured due to the water-induced disasters between June to 27 October 2021 (MoHA, 2021). Both natural and human factors such as steep slopes, fragile geology, high intensity of rainfall, deforestation, and unplanned human settlements are the major causes of landslides (Kathmandu Post, 2019). In recent years, there has been rapid construction of rural roads in Nepal as the demand and need for rural

development increases. Most of this road construction happens without a proper Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) of that particular landscape. Of the 53,143 kilometers of rural roads in Nepal, the majority have been built without following the correct environmental measures and are prone to natural disasters during the monsoon. This anthropogenic activity further exacerbated the risk of landslides and directly impacted the livelihoods of communities and in the worst cases, took lives.

During a disaster, women and girls are more affected and vulnerable than men and boys. Out of the total 8970 deaths from Gorkha Earthquake 2015, 56% were women (IFRC 2017, cited in CDMS). In the 2021 landslide, Ministry of Home Affairs reported that 178 dead of which 41% were women and girls. The impacts of disasters and crises are not gender-neutral, and global evidence shows that when disasters strike and humanitarian crises unfold, women and girls bear a

disproportionate impact, which is even greater in the rural areas. In order to address above mentioned vulnerability, a research project on Ecosystem based Disaster Risk Reduction (Eco-DRR) approach was implemented in Panchase Area of Western Nepal where the focus is to build resilience to landslide risk through application of Nature based Solutions i.e. demonstration of eco-safe roads or use of low-cost bioengineering technology to stabilise slopes and reduce landslides in three pilot sites. Initially, all the sites were managed by the community people (in leadership of male) but one site i.e. Tilahar from Parbat district the leadership was handed over to a community of women which helped the initiative becoming successful. As women are powerful agents of change and their leadership is critical to solving problems. Before implementation of activities at field level capacity of women group members was built to strengthen their leadership in ecosystem restoration practices at community level. The community women group actively engaged from the beginning of the project implementation.

During the course of implementation, the women group was led all the project activities at community level i.e. awareness raising, establishing demonstration sites for eco-safe roads, establishment of community nursery of bioengineering species, selection of grass species for bioengineering research, training on bioengineering technology, generating the evidence, engaging policy makers, sharing the



Figure 1: Mother groups practicing bioengineering techniques.





Figure 2: Members of mothers group ready for bioengineering training.

lessons learned and practicing nature conservation practices with the technical support of District Soil Conservation Office (DSCO) and facilitation of IUCN Nepal. They were successful in demonstrating the results of protecting infrastructure (school and community houses) especially from the effects of landslides through the Nature based Solutions approach.

This initiative demonstrated that the leadership of local women groups in collaboration with the local communities, government and the policy makers how effectively build eco-safe roads that eventually protect communities and infrastructure from land degradation caused by haphazard road construction and improve the roadside ecosystem, environment

leading to have resilient community in terms of DRR.

As the initiatives demonstrated that women's leadership is powerful and more effective in enhancing the resilience of communities and ecosystems, however, we must empower the young women to lead nature conservation initiatives and link the conservation with livelihood opportunities. For the empowerment of women in nature conservation we should focus on removing the barriers of women in the society i.e. structural barriers, institutional and individual mindsets and parallelly need to strengthen the women's institutions, joint community actions and economic activities and local governments (LG) should recognize link between reducing vulnerabilities of women and DRM

and resilience building of local area and include women as a stakeholder group that can act as a force of resilience building. Similarly, civil society actors should support local government by mobilising women's social capital by facilitating stronger networking, institutional development, capacity building, negotiating for and taking responsibilities for delivering solutions. ■

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Figure 3: Initial situation of demonstration sites.



Figure 4: Sites after mothers group interventions.



## CLBRC and Women Empowerment for Addressing Vulnerabilities

By Neeta Trivedi, SEWA, India

SEWA is an organisation of women workers of informal economy, believes and follows Gandhian philosophy of Swavlamban for empowerment of our members with objective of full employment and self-reliance, - economically and in decision making.

In the time of disaster, the poor and particularly women are most vulnerable within the community. SEWA's CLBRC - Community Learning and Business Resource Centres, established in the cluster of villages. This centers run by women and a hub for women to come together, work together in an enabling environment, which led to the thriving of women led businesses, thereby increasing their participation in the local economy. At CLBRC, SEWA ensures that women have access to microfinance, training on technical, financial and managerial skill for market led trade and business and networks needed to create businesses that contribute to their economic development. Around the world, women are being hit hard by the economic impacts of COVID-19. As the fallout from the

*"All the time we are alone in the house, performing daily chores with anxiety to be alone. I have joined SEWA and visited SEWA center in my village and met many women like myself., This is a place, where we can have good and quality time pass with sharing and caring to other women members. It is also opportunity to learn new skill as well as knowledge and information from other women, which help us to be mentally and emotionally strong."*

*Fiza Bano, Member of SEWA, Phyang village, Leh District, Ladakh, India*

pandemic deepens, so do the short and long term effects on women's empowerment. In such a hard time, the CLBRC established in Ladakh with its decentralized process and with women leadership stands out as a key example of women's economic development.

Due to limited economic opportunity in ladakh, men migrate and women stay alone at home. This impacts themental health of women, because being women, they fear unforeseen difficulties and challenges from the family and society.

We have learnt from more than 4 decades of experience of organising women in unrest, across the country including Kashmir and neighbouring

country Afghanistan that, work in the hands plays a healing role in life of women keeping them mentally occupied and helps them in leading a normal life after a shock and trauma of an extreme event. The feeling of togetherness, gives them mental peace and stability, where they can share her concern with other women at SEWA.

The CLBRC is one example of concrete action at grassroots level that have multiple linkages for achieving SDG goals. In the response to the 2001 Gujarat earthquake, SEWA initiated the process of establishment of community learning centre that facilitates the needs of local communities for building capacities. Later on, SEWA responded more systematically with local women that resulted into CLBRC. Based on learning with local communities the CLBRC process expanded to other states of India and neighbourhood countries that facilitates various social economic actions with and for local women and populations in need to build community resilience. ■



## With Women on the Way of Reducing Crises: A Successful Experience

By *Fatemeh Ashrafi, HAMI Founder, Iran*

The worldwide out-break of the COVID-19 pandemic has emerged as one of the greatest challenges facing humanity in recent history.. This crisis threatens all humans regardless of economic, social, educational, or gender conditions. Moreover, vulnerable groups including social, gender, refugees and economic minorities; often low-income groups, are exposed to more threats and damage.

The COVID-19 crisis started at the beginning of January 2019 in Iran and expanded and deteriorated with an increasing speed and gradually spread to a large number of urban and rural areas. The extent of this crisis, both geographically and demographically was so great that the government and its agencies did not have ability to meet the minimum basic needs of people for preventing the spread of COVID-19. Then it was necessary to absorb fully participation of Non-governmental organizations (NGO) for dealing with COVID-19 and its various effects through public call and mobilization, in order to use all available capacities; including economic, social, health and educational to provide services for all especially those who are most vulnerable social minorities.

The largest social minorities in Iran are refugees, asylum seekers and forced migrants with the vast majority of Afghans. Their population is estimated between 5-7 million, of which only 1.5 million have legal residency. They, respectably, are among marginalized, vulnerable and deprived groups of the society which



expected to have shown alarming effects and signs by involvement of this crisis, due to both economic shortcomings and social constraints.

For the same reasons, [HAMI Organization](#), as one of active NGOs in the field of refugees and forced immigrants, mobilized the facilities and upgraded available abilities, simultaneously with the outbreak of COVID-19 to meet the needs of the refugees and migrants in Iran, especially at two level of micro and macro impact in the field of policy for facilitating non-discriminatory access of refugees to health services and also the implementation of support and empowerment plans for local community of refugees, including women, children, corona victims' families and those who are most at risk..

Setting up the first center of face mask and hospital clothing production for medical centers, by the active cooperation of refugee women from the first days of prevalence of COVID-19 was one of the most effective activities of HAMI in dealing with this crisis. The

presence of women in the entrepreneurship of HAMI center for producing needed tools and items to prevent and confronting the spread of corona, was a multilateral opportunity to use the capacity of refugee women for advancing a pervasive social issue, and at the same time, this presence in economic pressure condition which was caused by the pandemic could compensate the economic weakness of the at-risk and vulnerable families. Production of millions masks and thousands of hospital clothing in less than 3 months from the beginning of out-break and distributing them among vulnerable groups and even sending them to Afghanistan for use at medical care centers and social services, with maximum participation of women refugee and minimum facilities was an opportunity to enhance the individual and social abilities of women, even to prove once again that by focusing on women's capabilities and their management power for planning and executing we could achieve the maximum impact from our efforts. ■

## Women of Pakistan Reducing Disaster Risks: A View from Pattan

By *Rabia Ghani*, Gender Coordinator, Pattan Development Organisation, Pakistan

Like rest of its neighboring countries, Pakistan too has been suffering from serious gender-based prejudices and disparities. Its manifestation is evident in almost all forms of public life and within family institution. Such as having fewer women in population, staggering registration gap between male and female as voters, and literacy gap. Consider. Only 5% women, while 57% male own immovable assets. Similarly, more men than women have access to digital world. According to PATTAN's researches (2014 & 2019) on gender-based disparities in the disaster prone areas, as many as 97% women were likely to have no participation in public life such as participation in congregations, festivals, politico-cultural rallies etc.

Despite these prejudices and discrimination, whenever and wherever girls and women are provided equal opportunities, they would perform better than their male counterparts. For instance, most top

positions of academic examinations have been won by women for the last many years. Today, there are more women in universities than men.

Moreover, PATTAN's own experience of working with poor and marginalised communities established the fact that women had taken their newfound public role very seriously. Pattan Development Organization began community development work in the aftermath of 1992 mega floods. During early phase of our work, we observed in almost all areas that traditional restrictions on women were relaxed. However, as the normalcy returned, restrictions would come back. It was a critical moment, required strategic intervention. We decided to use the opportunity. PATTAN first sensitized its own field teams about gender issues and then negotiated with each [male]partner community for the involvement of women. There was some passive resistance in the initial stage of dialogue, which was gradually evaporated.

To assess the acceptance of the gender strategy, we selected the most conservative community for testing. In village Sunnakh, more women than men participated in a brainstorming session on the role of women in reconstruction and rehabilitation. We were pleasantly surprised to see burqa (veil) clad women being articulate and frank while giving analyses and suggestions. The women of Megha village, district Sargodha disagreed with the male community. The village was situated on the left bank of River Jhelum and prone to annual flooding. While male members wanted us to reconstruct houses, the women suggested us to build embankment around the village. They argued embankment would save them from future inundations. It will save our mud houses too. They also argued floodwater would not spare even the *pukka* house. So, what's the point of building houses. After some discussion many men changed their opinion in favour of women's position. In other villages



*Unleash hidden potential of women.*





where men and women decided to have reconstruction of houses, both genders got equal ownership of the newly built houses<sup>4</sup>. These interventions not only diminish some gender disparities but also opened new avenues for more pro women interventions.

In the following years, women were trained to assess risks and vulnerabilities, to conduct need and damage assessment, and to distribute relief items. Their performance and honesty were appreciated by most including men.

In October 1999, General Musharraf sacked the civilian government and introduced a radical local government system including 33% seats for women. Many women who had served their respective communities since 1992 in PATTAN's program villages expressed their willingness to contest elections. But prior to announce their candidacy, they wanted to have endorsement of their respective communities. Village assemblies were held in most

villages. The women who intended to contest presented themselves for community approval. Amazingly, two-third of the women who had obtained prior endorsement won and some of them defeated nominees of large feudal lords.

By 2003, they played an important role in forming the countrywide Women Councilors' Network, which played the lead role in the aftermath of 2005 Earthquake and 2010 super

floods. During 2013-16, more than 500 women of ten flood affected districts participated in the gender-based disparities survey and were involved in governance monitoring surveys. Since the outbreak of COVID19, women have been playing an important role in highlighting issues of poor governance.

**Lesson:** Unleash hidden potential of women and that will build resilience of communities. ■

**NEW REPORT**

**Adaptation not at the Cost of Mitigation**  
 AIDMI welcomes the [IPCC Sixth Assessment Report: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability](#) and argues that adaptation cannot be at the cost of mitigation, that is, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and accelerating curbing of global warming must match adaptation. ■

<sup>4</sup> Bari, Farzana (1998); *Gender, Disaster, and Empowerment: A Case Study from Pakistan*. Published in "The Gender Terrain of Disaster-Through Women's Eyes" Edited by Elaine Enarson and Betty Hearn Morrow, <https://www.worldcat.org/title/gendered-terrain-of-disaster-through-womens-eyes/oclc/37878632>

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See AIDMI's recent report on **Learning Intersectionality of Women Led Disaster Preparedness and Resilience**

[http://www.aidmi.org/sub-images/reports/Learning%20WLDP\\_Training%20Report\\_AIDMI.pdf](http://www.aidmi.org/sub-images/reports/Learning%20WLDP_Training%20Report_AIDMI.pdf)

*The views expressed in this publication are those of the author.*

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