

# Gender Perspective Considerations in Disasters like Earthquakes and Floods of Pakistan

Muhammad Naseem Baig and Razia Sharif

**Abstract**—From past many decades human beings are suffering from plethora of natural disasters. Occurrence of disasters is a frequent process; it changes conceptual myths as more and more advancement are made. Although we are living in technological era but in developing countries like Pakistan disasters are shaped by socially constructed roles. The need is to understand the most vulnerable group of society i.e. females; their issues are complex in nature because of undermined gender status in the society. There is a need to identify maximum issues regarding females and to enhance the achievement of millennium development goals (MDGs). Gender issues are of great concern all around the globe including Pakistan. Here female visibility in society is low, and also during disasters, the failure to understand the reality that concentrates on double burden including productive and reproductive care. Women have to contribute a lot in society so we need to make them more disaster resilient. For this non-structural measures like awareness, trainings and education must be carried out. In rural and in urban settings in any disaster like earthquake or flood, elements like gender perspective, their age, physical health, demographic issues contribute towards vulnerability. In Pakistan the gender issues in disasters were of less concern before 2005 earthquake and 2010 floods. Significant achievements are made after 2010 floods when gender and child cell was created to provide all facilities to women and girls. The aim of the study is to highlight all necessary facilities in a disaster to build coping mechanism in females from basic rights till advance level including education.

**Keywords**—Disaster resilient, Gender cell, Millennium development.

## I. INTRODUCTION

ASIA is prone to disasters because of topography and climatic conditions. Major disasters faced by these countries are Tsunami, cyclones, earthquakes, and floods. Natural disasters have direct social and economic impacts so it poses hindrance in development. Moreover impacts of disasters are not homogenous, it mostly affects more vulnerable group especially the marginalized group.

Females are the most vulnerable and are more at risk during disasters. Females experience high rate of mortality, morbidity and dependence on others for basic needs. There are certain underlying factors which exacerbate vulnerability of female which includes cultural norms, lack of access to resources, lack of initiative ability, in most cases deprived of education and even on basic health and other needs.

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Male and female vary in needs, priorities, capacities in setting of disaster and their resilience also varies. The most obvious examples are Pakistan flood 2010 and Kashmir 2005 earthquake. If women deaths are less than men, women suffer more in cases like family separation. Women completely rely on husband resulting in financial and moral crises.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Women through traditional feminine ways tend to create more socio-emotional oriented ties, whereas men through traditional masculine ways tend to create more institution-oriented networks. Like so it is increasingly acknowledged that different social networks can be allocating resources in different ways [1].

“Response of women with respect to occurrence of a natural disaster can be classified in two categories, initial reactions and long term reactions” [2]. Several studies conclude the needs of women in disasters and emergencies. The importance of incorporating women into decision making processes to ensure that their increased vulnerabilities are considered [3].

Women tend to have limited literacy, and less time to participate in meetings (due to domestic, agricultural and other tasks). Even if they have time, they may be socially constrained from attending. “Informational vulnerability” can be fatal – for example, many people (both women and men) interviewed by researchers after the 2005 Kashmir earthquake in Pakistan considered that “God’s will and destiny chooses who survives and what places get destroyed” [4].

A UNHABITAT study says that during conflict, women play variety of roles, as supporters, soldiers, mothers and wives, advocates for peace, and innocent victims. However, in post conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation, these experiences, and the unique needs of women are often invisible. Conflict brings about extreme alterations in social dynamics. Women will have developed new coping strategies and mechanisms for interacting with society, as displaced persons or traveling with militias, or simply in the absence of men in the community. These dynamics will again be challenged in the post conflict period [5].

The capacity of human societies to withstand disasters is determined primarily by the internal strengths and weaknesses of the society, level of social, economic and cultural vulnerability. The capacities to cope with the disaster impact are different depending on social conditions; poor and rich, men and women, young and old, indigenous or non-indigenous, etc. Gender cuts across these various groups and

has important light to shed on the devising of specific strategies to cope with disasters [6].

### III. PAKISTAN PERSPECTIVE

Geographically Pakistan lies between latitudes 24 and 37 degree north and longitudes 62 and 75 degree east covering total land area of 796,095sq. km. It is basically land of diverse topography and variable climatic conditions. The topography varies from Mountains, deserts, plateaus and plains. Geographical division of country comprises of three categories northern highlands, Indus River plain and Baluchistan plateau.

Like other South Asian countries Pakistan is also suffering from plethora of natural and manmade disasters which includes earthquakes, cyclones, drought, floods, terrorist attacks, chemical spills, accidents etc. Vulnerabilities vary from type and extent of disaster, with special emphasis on female due to cultural norms and social impacts. In Pakistan gender issues were of less concern before 2005 earthquake and 2010 floods. In 2010 floods situation was extremely severe, due to cultural constraints females were deprived of basic needs. The direct consequences of these disasters are on economy, food shortage, skin diseases, and maternal care

issues. This demanded special attention towards meeting the needs of females.

In order to cope up the challenges faced in 2010, National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) Pakistan created Gender and child cell with assistance of UNICEF. It enables coordination mechanism with National commission for status of women, Ministry of women development. It addresses all issues arising in flood and to provide assistance to all females.

With assistance of Ministry of women development and Benazir crisis center eleven such centers were created with defined standard operating procedures. Follow up workshops to give awareness and trainings related to gender issues were also held with sponsorship of UNICEF and other NGOs.

#### *A. Major Floods and Earthquakes of Pakistan with Subsequent Gender Issues*

Pakistan is facing different disasters from time to time. A recent major disaster in Pakistan's history includes floods of 2010 and earthquakes of 2005. An internal study carried out by DRR wing of NDMA given as Table I below clearly depicts all the losses and also draws comparison with other major disasters of the world [7].

TABLE I  
COMPARISON OF PAKISTAN'S DISASTER WITH OTHER MAJOR DISASTERS OF THE WORLD

	Pakistan flood 2010	Pakis-tan EQ 2005	Katrina USA 2005	Nargis cyclone Myanmar 2008	Indian ocean tsunami	Haiti Earthquake 2010
Population affected	20251550	3500000	500000	2420000	2273723	3200000
Area affected sqkm	132000	30000	N.A.	23500	N.A.	13226
Deaths (No.)	1985	73338	1836	84537	238000	230000
Injured (No.)	2946	128309	N.A.	19359	125000	300000

From the study of 2005 earthquake and 2010 floods the most palpable ways in which women suffered includes following:

- Women loss interest in daily life activities if her close family member died.
- Lack of legal rights particularly for illiterate women.
- Girls if become orphan than in most cases she becomes more vulnerable economically.
- Emotionally unstable if her close one died in disaster.
- Lack of privacy in shelter camps which enhance sense of insecurity.
- Increased sense of responsibility which sometimes makes it difficult to even fulfills basic needs.

### IV. WORLDWIDE DISASTER RELATED GENDER PRACTICES

- a. There are certain efforts to incorporate gender perspective into disaster management which includes Universal Declaration of human rights, the convention on elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and convention on rights of child.
- b. Hyogo framework for action (HFA) restates the importance of integrating gender perspective in risk policies plans.
- c. Regional Action Plan on Gender and Disaster for Latin America and the Caribbean.

- d. Millennium development goals (MDGs).

### V. ANALYSIS OF GENDER ISSUES IN DISASTERS

Globally women are poorer than men. Women as compared to men are disproportionately employed. Inherited laws, customs, traditions, marriage arrangements and social patterns (that reinforce women dependence on fathers, husbands and sons) all contribute to unequal access of women to resources and also the lack of power initiative to change things. Health problems due to multiple births also contribute to low productivity. Traditional expectations and home based responsibilities limit the women's mobility, access to new opportunities, involvement in political process and myriad of other resources. The most obvious discriminatory times for females in disasters are:

- a. During phase of evacuation
- b. During distribution of relief
- c. General health related issues
- d. Reproductive health
- e. Security issues
- f. Gender based violence

Gender analysis involves visualizing all needs of women and highlighting the challenges faced by women. It is important to consider gender related issues in initial phases of

planning otherwise plan must be flexible that when disaster strikes this factor easily adds on.

It is basically a detailed analysis in which all factors from evacuation to gender violence are discussed. It specifies the needs of women, when disaster strikes it effects reproductive needs of women. Women often feel reluctant to ask about basic needs because in process of distribution of relief males are involved so female always feel hesitant.

Security of shelter camps is also important, so need arises to hire trustworthy companies with clean and credible record/reputation. Distribution of food and shelter for women must be given special attention, e.g. winter clothing in summer is useless. Females must be incorporated in distribution mechanism.

A disaster clearly depicts strength and weakness of society. It is the hidden test which shows that how society copes with all issues including gender issues. It is the test of all stakeholders involved in disaster. And in case of females special feeling of love and care is mandatory because they are backbone of society.

#### A. Factors Affecting the Resilience

There are certain factors which affect resilience of men and women:

- Human resource factors including food, health and nutrition
- Division of labor
- Status in society
- Income source
- Access to resources (emergency aid/insurance mechanism)
- Legal protection
- Social protection
- Control in decision making process

### VI. VULNERABILITY FACTORS WITH REFERENCE TO PAKISTAN PERSPECTIVE

#### A. Physical Aspects

Physical vulnerability includes how location, infrastructure and built in environment are prone to disaster. Poor men are physically vulnerable to disaster but poor women are more because of gender based inequalities. In 2010 floods women faced more problems related to food, shelter, health, water and sanitation. After this another strategy WASH (water and sanitation hygiene strategy) came into practice.

#### B. Livelihood Factor

In Pakistan male livelihood is more visible as compared to female. Female often engages in low income occupation. There are only few seats of women in parliament meaning thereby that women have less access to power which make them vulnerable.

#### C. Social Aspects (Gender Based Trainings)

Social aspects include education, good governance, values, customs, lifestyle etc. In all these aspects women are more vulnerable as compared to men. It also includes awareness

trainings to community in which males are always in majority. As indicated in NDMA Report 2010 [7] given at Table II below.

TABLE II  
NDMA REPORT 2010

Training	Date	Male	Female	Total Participants
DRM planning	February 23-26,2010	30	0	30
for District officials	June 08-11,2010	17	1	18
Grand total		47	1	48

#### D. Economic Aspect

It includes women access to assets (human, financial, social and physical) the more assets they have more is the coping capacity. After 2005 Kashmir earthquake it is analyzed that women are economically much weaker, they mostly rely on male members for all resources making them more vulnerable.

### VII. GENDER AND COORDINATION

From recent disasters it is clear that gender and coordination is the most challenging task, to coordinate with right stakeholder and to disseminate right information regarding female needs in times of disaster. In earthquake of 2005, Pakistan received aids from many countries but the distribution was too crucial. Authors would like to conclude it by saying that "*In disasters it is better to plan and coordinate with women rather than for women*".

### VIII. NON-STRUCTURAL MEASURES RELATED TO GENDER IN DISASTER

Nonstructural measures include awareness, education and training. Females must be aware of responding when disaster strikes. Education to women related to disaster management enhances female resilience. In Pakistan National University of Sciences and Technology (NUST) took initiative by starting disaster management as core course with 20 pioneers including 6 females. Trainings will also help them to understand disaster management and those will also be able to support rescue and search in times of emergency.

### IX. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are drawn from this study.

- Social context differ from country to country and even culture to culture so need is to investigate it locally.
- Both men and women should be involved in prevention, preparation (emergency plans, education,) and in recovery phase.
- Disaster management assessment teams should include gender specialists as well.
- Gender audit assessment must be carried out which ensures collection of complete gender related data.
- Particular attention should be given to women workload.
- There is a need to develop gender based training programs, Case based training exercises and training courses should also be developed.
- Since disasters also provide opportunity so need is to respect and develop the capacities of women.

- h. Implementation of gender integration in all tiers to be ensured which will enhance the achievement of MDG's

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