Women play a primary role in providing assistance to their family and the community in disaster prevention activities, as well as during and after disasters. However, the crucial role women play in sustaining household and community economies and social networks is not often fully recognised. Gender equality is, thus, an important aspect in disaster risk reduction. Without it no sustainable risk reduction can be achieved.

**GENDER AND DISASTER RISK REDUCTION**

Cordaid wants to mainstream and further intensify a solid gender sensitive perspective in its disaster risk reduction objectives. Implicit to Cordaid’s community managed disaster risk reduction programme people are involved that reflect the composition of the community: men, women, young people, elders and more. Still, getting women involved appears at times challenging. If women are present in certain committees, this does not necessarily mean that they are actively contributing. The challenge then remains to assure women are actually actively participating.

One solution that Cordaid has implemented is to set up separate women’s meetings on DRR. Amongst themselves, women often feel more comfortable to raise their voice. A representative of the women’s meeting, for example an older, powerful woman, can then reflect the opinion of the women when discussing disaster risk reduction with other village committee members.

**CASE STUDY from CEMENTERA, HONDURAS**

Cementera is located at the municipality of Lepaera in the department of Lempira, Honduras. It lies within the protected area of the Montaña de Puca and the micro river basin of Río Yargual. Cementera is part of the Catholic diocese of Santa Rosa de Copan. The community suffers from storms, heavy rains and landslides.

In Cementera, Cordaid’s partner organization Caritas Santa Rosa de Copán undertook the following activities, in their Community Managed Disaster Risk Reduction project: Community disaster risk assessment and analysis; Community capacity building and organisation; Support for Community DRR action plans; and Lobby & advocacy.

Through these activities, the community achieved the following results:

**Higher awareness**

The leaders and the community of Cementera are more aware of risks, threats, vulnerabilities and capacities of their community. The major part of the population, including the women and the youth, participated in meetings in which the community analyses were done, which increased their awareness about risks and their ability to reduce them.
High level of participation

Also, there was a high level of participation in developing the Community’s Development Plan, the Contingency Plan, the Rehabilitation Plan of the micro water basin, the Monitor & Evaluation System and the Participatory Learning Assessment.

The following community organizations joined the process: the Water Board, Community Development Councils, Women’s Network, Farm Groups and Parent Company. The local emergency committees were founded through the project and also participated in the process. A very positive element in this CMDRR process is the relative high involvement of young people including girls in the community work, through the use of video as a tool for Disaster Risk Reduction. So far seventeen youngsters have been directly involved in this. They film DRR activities to share with everybody in the community, with other communities and to learn from themselves.

Mitigation activities

The villagers, supported by their leaders, continue to implement mitigation measures to reduce risks and vulnerabilities. Examples are: reforestation, a nursery garden, improvement of road sections, creating barriers at farm plots, installation of personal water tanks, relocation of houses at vulnerable spots and the construction of houses in safe places.

Women participation

The participation of the women has increased: they are speaking up about their ideas on the reduction of disasters and above all are active to encourage men to adopt some of their risk reducing strategies.

Two of the major lessons learned in this CMDRR process in Honuras were:

- Participation of women in daily life in the community has increased through CMDRR;
- A good way to involve young people, both boys and girls, is through using modern technologies, like the filming that was done during this programme.

These are examples of the vital role women play in disaster risk reduction in their community. Before, the relation between women in the community was not as strong, now however they are empowered to save themselves and their livelihoods in times of disaster.

About Cordaid

In emergency situations, the poorest are often the most vulnerable. Cordaid (Catholic Organisation for Relief and Development) believes that the people hit hardest by disasters know best where the threats are, what they can do about them, and what support they need to better protect themselves. Thus, Cordaid works with local organisations and authorities to support communities to identify disaster risks themselves - both from natural hazards and man-made hazards (e.g. conflict) - and to work on preventive and mitigation measures. This community managed disaster risk reduction (CMDRR) approach, increases communities’ resilience, prevents or mitigates disasters and safeguards their lives and livelihood assets. For more information, visit www.cordaid.nl.