



## Gender Equality in Disasters: Six Principles for Engendered Relief and Reconstruction

**1. THINK BIG.** Gender equality and risk reduction principles must guide all aspects of disaster mitigation, response and reconstruction. The “window of opportunity” for change and political organization closes very quickly. Plan now to:

- respond in ways that empower women and local communities
- rebuild in ways that address the root causes of vulnerability, including gender and social inequalities
- create meaningful opportunities for women’s participation and leadership
- fully engage local women in hazard mitigation and vulnerability assessment projects
- ensure that women benefit from economic recovery and income support programs e.g. access, fair wages, non-traditional skills training, child care/social support
- give priority to social services, children’s support systems, women’s centres, women’s “corners” in camps and other safe spaces
- take practical steps to empower women, among others:
  - consult fully with women in design and operation of emergency shelter
  - deed newly constructed houses in both names
  - include women in housing design as well as construction
  - promote land rights for women
  - provide income-generation projects that build non-traditional skills
  - fund women’s groups to monitor disaster recovery projects

**2. GET THE FACTS.** Gender analysis is not optional or divisive but imperative to direct aid and plan for full and equitable recovery. Nothing in disaster work is “gender neutral.” Plan now to:

- collect and solicit gender-specific data
- train and employ women in community-based assessment and follow-up research
- tap women’s knowledge of environmental resources and community complexity
- identify and assess sex-specific needs e.g. for home-based women workers, men’s mental health, displaced and migrating women vs. men
- track the (explicit/implicit) gender budgeting of relief and response funds
- track the distribution of goods, services, opportunities to women and men
- assess the short- and long-term impacts on women/men of all disaster initiatives
- monitor change over time and in different contexts

**3. WORK WITH GRASSROOTS WOMEN.** Women’s community organizations have insight, information, experience, networks, and resources vital to increasing disaster resilience. Work with and develop the capacities of existing women’s groups such as:

- women’s groups experiences in disasters
- environmental action groups
- women and development NGOs
- women’s advocacy groups with a focus on girls and women e.g. peace activists, women’s neighbourhood groups, faith-based and service organizations
- professional women e.g. educators, scientists, emergency managers

**4. RESIST STEREOTYPES.** Base all initiatives on knowledge of difference and specific cultural, economic, political, and sexual contexts, not on false generalities:

- women survivors are vital first responders and rebuilders, not passive victims
- mothers, grandmothers and other women are vital to children’s survival and recovery but women’s needs may differ from children’s
- not all women are mothers or live with men
- women-led households are not necessarily the poorest or most vulnerable
- women are not economic dependents but producers, community workers, earners
- gender norms put boys and men at risk too e.g. mental health, risk-taking, accident
- targeting women for services is not always effective or desirable as it can produce backlash or violence
- marginalised women (e.g. undocumented, HIV/AIDS, low caste, indigenous, sex workers) have unique perspectives and capacities
- no “one-size” fits all: culturally specific needs and desires must be respected e.g. women’s traditional religious practices, clothing, personal hygiene, privacy norms

**5. TAKE A HUMAN RIGHTS APPROACH.** Democratic and participatory initiatives serve women and girls best. Women and men alike must be assured of the conditions of life needed to enjoy their fundamental human rights, as well as simply survive. Girls and women in crisis are at increased risk of:

- sexual harassment and rape
- abuse by intimate partners e.g. in the months and year following a major disaster
- exploitation by traffickers e.g. into domestic, agricultural and sex work
- erosion or loss of existing land rights
- early/forced marriage
- forced migration
- reduced or lost access to reproductive health care services
- male control over economic recovery resources

**6. RESPECT AND DEVELOP THE CAPACITIES OF WOMEN.**

Avoid overburdening women with already heavy work loads and family responsibilities likely to increase.

- identify and support women’s contributions to informal early warning systems, school and home preparedness, community solidarity, socio-emotional recovery, extended family care
- materially compensate the time, energy and skill of grassroots women who are able and willing to partner with disaster organisations
- provide child care, transportation and other support as needed to enable women’s full and equal participation in planning a more disaster resilient future

More information is available from the Gender and Disaster Network:

<http://www.gdnonline.org>  
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