

Participation of Women in the Community Based Disaster Preparedness Program: A Critical Understanding

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(A Critical Understanding)

Commissioned by CARE, India, this study was carried out by Chaman Pincha, Gender Researcher and Consultant, with support from Shakeb Nabi, Program Manager, Tsunami Response Program Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Care India.

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Executive Summary

Participation of women in the Community Based Disaster Preparedness(CBDP)program, a short qualitative study, commissioned by Care India looks into the degree and nature of women's role in the processes of Community Based Disaster Preparedness (CBDP) Program. It does it with the understanding that women's role cannot be analysed in isolation from an understanding of how men maintain a status quo in their roles in the processes. The study comes out with the findings that underline the transformation women have experienced within themselves by participating in the processes of CBDP. The transformation happens mainly through those components of the program which bring them into the public spaces, give them opportunities and context to question the stereotypical role allocations in the CBDP. The examples are women learning non traditional skills such as rescuing, managing relief camps and doing damage assessments.

The study grapples with the dilemma if women's increased participation in CBDP has increased their work burden as they have to juggle with their household chores as well as give time to attend meetings and trainings. The analysis of field information reveals that the gains, women feel, have outweighed the sense of pressure due to multi tasking in public and private domains. That women now feel they are not dependent on men folk for their rescue and survival, is single most major perception of gain related by most women in the three islands covered by the study, i.e., Neil, Havelock and Sippighat.

However, the study also points out that where the display of knowledge and perceived symbols of knowledge , i.e, are in questions, men still have more spaces than women. It is the same with the decision making processes and institutions built by CBDP program, such as Village Disaster Management Committes(VDMCs). However, when women start analysing the situations critically, they tend to contest the prevailing gender based biases in order to claim strategic roles in the program.

The study highlights that participation in terms of number need not necessarily mean effective or substantive participation. Similarly token representation of women in some taskforces, such as rescue, camp management and VDMCs does not really amount to real participation of women.

It comes out with a few insights gleaned from the voices of women and men in the field, which, if integrated in the processes of shaping up policies and implementation of the programs, would usher in gender equity in CBDP processes and institutions.

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Introduction

Background

CARE India with the help of European Commission's Humanitarian Aid Department is implementing a Community Based Disaster Preparedness Program in the Disaster Prone Andaman and Nicobar Islands of India. The main objective of the program is to Improve disaster preparedness and risk management capacity of the vulnerable population in the Andaman Region, through sustainable institutional mechanism.

CARE India is working in 100 villages across the Andaman and Nicobar Islands with specific focus on building the capacities of the most marginalized communities to better protect themselves from natural hazards and its impacts through improved awareness and skills required for the same.

It has been observed in the program that the participation of women is more than as per the plan. The plan was to ensure the participation of at least 30 percent of women; but it has been observed that it is around 66 percent with the result that most of the interventions of the program have more presence of women. Through this study CARE India intends to look into the following aspects:

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1. What were the factors which led to increased participation of women in the program?
2. How the participation of women led to positive and negative influences on the program?
3. Has the participation of women in the disaster preparedness program increased her burden?
4. Suggest strategies for productive participation of women in a disaster preparedness program
5. What are the roles & responsibilities that specifically women & men would like to undertake as task force members and why?
6. What are the aspects of disaster preparedness that women or men would like to know /learn?

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to stimulate the critical thinking on the meaning of women's participation in any program, including CBDP. The micro level analysis by discussing different meaning of women's participation, situate their experinece in the larger framework of gender needs. The study offers practitioners and palnners concrete ideas for incorporating women's and gender issues more fully into their work. The study attempts to offer a new perspective on women's experiences, needs and interests in disaster which, if fed into the policy planning and program implementation would ensure meaningful participation of women at very level of disaster management, including CBDP.

Objectives

This report focuses on the Care India's intervention in the area of Disaster Prepredness through a gender lens to examine the role of women and men in the Community Based Preparedness(CBDP) program. More precisely, it looks into the nature of benefits of incresed participation of women in the CBDP process. It also unfolds the implication of such participation and suggests the ways to take the process forward in more productive ways.

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Methodology

The methodology adopted is qualitative. The sources of field information were both primary and secondary. Primary sources consist of interaction with the community resource persons and semi structured interviews with the program staff of CARE. A half a day's participatory workshop with the program staff and Community Resource



Persons(CRPs)—the driving force to mobilise the communities-- mapped their perceptions of women's role in the CBDP program as well as the benefits and perceived/real problems associated with it. The direct information was gathered through focus group discussions with women and men in Neil, and Havelock and Sippighat in southern Andman. Besides, informal interactions were held with some women and men and two Panchayat Pradhans. Men were not excluded by design, but during the field visits, except Sippighat, no interaction with the men was organised due to several reasons, one being that it was the busy season for cultivating vegetables in the Neil Island and menfolk were generally not available for such discussions.

Individual semi structured yet informal interaction were held with several task force members and Pradhans of two panchayats(System of local self governance), one man and one woman pradhan.

The review of secondary literature consists of study of the project proposal and mid-term evaluation report. As well, contingency plan documents of two areas, i.e., Havelock and Sippighat were studied

The information gathered was analysed through a gender lens. In the process of analysis the factors especailly looked into are those mentioned in the terms of reference for this study. Within the main questions, a set of subquestions emerged in the process of focus groups and individual interviews. Some of them are mentioned below:

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- What were the factors which led to increased participation of women in the program?
- Is the participation just at a formal level?
- Does the participation address the strategic needs of women?

(Enhanced mobility in public spaces, leadership positions, learning non traditional and highly valued skills, negotiating powers etc.)

- Are women part of decision making process?
- The type of decision made by women and those made by men
- Is the participation sustainable?

Scope

The report does not explain the components of CBDP in detail. Its focus is on the role of women in the process of carrying out various process of CBDP(Needs and risk analysis, Participatory learning and action, formation of task force and contingency plans, linkages with the local governance) and the consequent change in the mindset from helplessness and dependency to that of self and collective confidence for proactive response in the immediate aftermath of disaster.

Since the analysis is based on limited FGDs, one may come across some repetitive references across issues taken up in this report.

Limitations

The qualitative methodology requires a series of group discussions to have the density of information. The more the information, the deeper the analysis. However, in the present assignment a total of only 4 FGDs had happened with the two most engaging discussions in Sippighat. In other Islands, discussion with men did not take place, and discussions with women were hurriedly wound up because they started late and women understandably wanted to leave before it gets dark, as the houses there are scattered at greater distance from one another.

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Similarly, the workshop with the CRPs may have fetched more information and deeper perception, if it has been at least a day long.

Since the information is gathered from only 3 islands out of 100 project areas, it may not be considered as a representative sample, and therefore findings may not be considered as representative findings. The study attempts to map the broad outcomes of women's participation in the CBDP program for the agenda of preparedness.

Structure of the report

The report is divided into two sections: Findings and Conclusions. The findings are not exactly grouped into the order of questions in the TOR, but an integrated analysis of all the issues put together. The analysis though has addressed all the major questions raised in the ToR. Hence the reading would give insights into the nature and impact of women's participation, and its impact on the program.

The concluding section is an outcome of the analysis. It captures some insights which can be incorporated at the policy and programmatic levels to integrate gender concerns in the CBDP programs.

2

Findings



This section presents the major findings. It critically analyses the facilitating factors for enhanced participation of women and the nature of roles and responsibilities which men and women tend to prefer. It further elaborates on the opportunities that participatory tools have opened up for expanding the social, psychological and political spaces for women. Finally, the section addresses

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the dilemma, reflected in the TOR, if women are overburdened due to their participation in processes of CBDP and if their enhanced participation has direct corelation with the apathy of men to participate in the CBDP initiatives.

Facilitating Factors for enhanced participation of women

Women's self-realisation of their lack of capacities and opportunities offered by CBDP were the two important driving forces of their enthusiastic response to this program. These points emerged clearly from the focus groups and workshop interactions. CBDP and the community mobilisation processes with specific emphasis on inclusion of the excluded groups (including women, people with disabilities and the elderly), provided them avenue to equip themselves with necessary information which can save lives and important assets.

The benefits have brought in changes to their day to day lives. Women have gained greater confidence due to moving out in the public spaces for meetings and trainings that take place in the villages. Inclusion of the women in the task forces and their participation in the Gram Sabha meeting have worked to change the mindset of women about their own capacities.

The focus groups in Neil, Havelock and Sippighat have revealed that CBDP made women aware of why they are considered as vulnerable. This awareness in turn pointed to the possibility that the gendered vulnerabilities can be reduced by learning new skills or sharpening the skills for purpose other than the personal. For example, women reported that though some of them knew how to swim even prior to the rescue training, they never did it for purpose other than bathing. Hence they would not have confidence when one needs to swim against the strong currents in a disaster situation.

The simple and easily usable tips for saving lives like keeping afloat in times of floods /tsunamis using empty plastic bottles, plastic covers filled even with paper bits and other leaves, tucked around the legs with pants tied tightly, use of plastic cans tied to bamboo sticks etc. made women realise that they need not necessarily depend on male help which sometimes does not come in

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time due to the general chaos in the emergency situation and sometimes is not accepted by women themselves for fear of gender based violence. Moreover the obvious gain is in the understading of both women and men alike that once women are equipped with the skills of preparedness they can negotiate for better service and can themselves look into their needs critically with an understanding that meeting the emergency needs are their entitlements.

Damage assessment is what stood most important skills for women and men in Sippighat.

“We realised its importnace through our own personal as well as collective experience. We had our houses in bad repair, we lost the cultivable lands, our only means of livelihood. Yet there is no compensation as yet. Having training in damage assessment is essential. It is to know how to assess the damage, how to present in the written form and to whom to address it. None in the community know it before Tsunami. Post tsunami the non redressal of the damages have made them acutely aware of how important the training is for carrying out a damage assessment”(FGD with women and men in Sippighat).

That women can save women more efficienly and tend to injured women, and children was a crucial factor in increasing the participation of women in the process; the motivation is intrinsic. It is to get prepared for any eventuality.

Women have seen it as necessary skills, more so women with disability. Gaining skills to protect themeselves and cope with the disasters in a proactive manner, and coming in the mainstream was previously never imagined.

In Sippighat , Paro Mandal, a woman with both her legs lost, was initially supported by the CRPs to come for the CBDP meeting. The meeting interested and motivated her for two reasons
1) that she is able to mix with the mainstream community and expereince the outside world and

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2) she found information on the special focus on People with disability and their entitlements very empowering. She was filled with confidence; she also took these meetings as opportunity to learn skills which she would be capable of using in her day to day life, apart from being useful to others in the event of an emergency. Thus, she learnt first aid skills. She volunteered to be a member of the camp management task force and was included in the same. Life for her has changed since then. Not only she has found a new meaning in her life, she has also seen the change in the perception of the community towards her. Today she is known more for what she can do in spite of her disability than what she cannot do.

Another reason for the active participation of women is that ICDS became an active platform for the CBDP information dissemination and meetings. Women and men relate it now not only to healthcare and immunisation centre but as a palce where women are being educated on the importance and skills of how to respond to the disasters effectively. Since ICDS is a much accepted place by the community , women mostly gather there for the meetings, without any resistance from the community. ICDS workers themselves are members of the task forces, thus instituationalising its role in the disaster preparedness programs.



Aarthi Mistry from Govind Nagar Panchayat of Havelock Island is a woman of grit and determination. A busy home maker and juggling with her time between her household chores and vegetable market where she sells the vegetables, she heads the SHG for past 3 years. She had attended a one month long training in Calcutta. It was an intensive training which opened up the whole new world for her. It was not just the skills that she learnt but combined with it was the increased confidence that she is capable of saving herself,

her family as well as others in case of crisis.

“Unless I feel confident of saving myself, how can I save others”? Arthy says emphatically.

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The responsibility of their own survival was acknowledged by many women like Arthy in the course of CBDP. What CBDP has done to women in this sense is of transformational nature.

“We women were conditioned that men are the prime rescuers, and they will rescue us. But in a disaster or crisis situation, this sense of dependency results in panic, trauma and helplessness. The mindsets are changing now, and this change is remarkably visible in the case of women who have attended the trainings. Also women who regularly participate in the meetings have started thinking in terms of women’s survival and quality of life after survival as well as the necessary skills that they should be equipped with.” *Anika Das, Vijay Nagr, Neil Island*

Yet another motivating factor for these meetings is the opportunity that the CBDP program which challenged the restricted mobility of women in the areas visited (except in Sippighat).

“We never come out of the houses and farm lands attached to them¹. The meetings are the only means that we are able to extricate ourselves from the routine drudgery, It’s an occasion for not only learning and hearing new and exciting things, but also to know more closely other women in the village. Before we started meeting regularly, we rarely talked to each other”(Women in the Focus Group in Neil Island)



There is no neighbourhood sort of thing here as each house is located quite at a distance from the other. However, these meetings bring them together. Women come with toddlers and children and sometimes it is difficult to conduct the meetings. Their attention remain divided but they still do not want to miss any meetings. The knowledge that they gain, have immense value to them, even a small piece of information becomes vital piece of knowledge which they share with the entire family. Not the same as men who tend to keep the knowledge to themselves or share with

¹ Each settler in Neil and Havelock has a land of 5 acres granted by the government of Union Territory of the Andmans, where they live as well as cultivate. Majority of the populations in these Islands comprise of Bengali settlers who migrated in the aftermath of the formation of Bangladesh, and got the Indian citizenship. **Please check the accuracy**

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other men. Also once women go out , they have to give recount of their meetings to their families. Indirectly, thus the message gets disseminated through the village if women attend the meetings.

Gendered Roles and Responsibilities

From the conversation of the CRPs and other staff of the organisation it is gathered that the community members choose their own roles. However one has to be aware if the choices are based on equal availability of opportunities or shaped by the traditional gender roles and mainstream discourse which clubs women, children and people with disabilities together. How women perceive themselves and are perceived have a lot to do with the choices that women make about themselves. So is the case with men. In fact that is the reason that not many men are seen in first aid and psycho- social counselling.

The field discussions highlighted that some women do perceive themselves to be fit for roles that are assumed to be men's role. For example, Aarthy Mistry from Radhanagar, Havelock Island, is a competent rescuer and is in the task force. Some women even contest and renegotiate the position that has been given to them. A case in point is Sippighat where women stake their claims for equal representation in the Disaster Management committee which coordinates the task forces and is responsible for finally putting the contingency plan in place. It also has linkages with the Panchayat level disaster committee.

The Sippighat women had analysed their regular participation in the CBDP and insisted that adequate representation is ensured for them across task forces and the coordinating committee, so that women's interests and concerns are authentically represented by women themselves. The analysis shows that Sippighat women started coming out of in the public domain for the purpose of livelihood after the tsunamai affected their lands. They were more mobile than the women of Neil and Havelock even pre tsunami. However, the tough life that they started living made them realise that a critical ability to analyse the governance is necessary for protecting their legitimate interest. The women exercised the same attitude and intelligenec in making their presence felt in

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the community structures, including the institutions established by CBDP program. In fact the example of Sippighat can be emulated in other CBDP project areas.

Involvement of women and girls in the task force, especially in the rescue and early warning, has challenged their traditional roles. In all the areas visited, women felt the needs to be self-reliant and were immediately able to grasp the importance of CBDP. It is precisely here that women are more articulate as to how it has contributed towards expanding political and personal spaces for them. After initial resistance there was a change in perception of men in the communities. Women's participation in the meetings related to CBDP had one positive unintended impact: some Muslim women are coming out of their houses and learning new skills and survival strategies. Who is fit for which task force is decided by the majority, although sometimes the decisions are contested and re-negotiated, as explained above by the individuals. Task force units are considered change agents by the community and have become vehicle for effective communication for disaster risk reduction through self reliance.

PLA(Participatory Learning and Action) meetings: the empowering experience

The PLA remains a community-owned process. The gathering of women for PLA and transect walk—two of the major tools of CBDP-- seem to have had positive impact and have brought attitudinal changes in women, men, boys and girls (in the areas visited) about the role of women in the community. From the interaction with various groups, it has been gathered that prior to CBDP, they were aware of places like schools, Anganwadis², religious places, wells and ponds etc. However, women were not aware of the safe and risk prone places and safe escape routes, understandably because women's movements remain confined to the needs of the household chores, such as dropping children to Anganwadis and schools, taking the sick to the health care centers, fetching water etc. The discussions with women revealed, that the restricted movement and ignorance about the safe and unsafe routes, makes them as well as children more vulnerable

² **Anganwadi:** The Anganwadi, literally the courtyard play centre, is a childcare centre, located within the village or the slum area itself. Anganwadi is the focal point for the delivery of services at the community level, to children below six years of age, pregnant and nursing mothers, and adolescent girls. Anganwadi centre also serves as the meeting place for women's groups, mothers' clubs and mahila mandals promoting awareness and joint action for child development and women's empowerment.

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in comparison to men. What PLA has done is to introduce their village to them in an organized manner. While on the one hand women have become aware of the crucial nature of their knowledge, which they and the community on the whole tend to discount, on the other hand, they have gained new knowledge of the landscape of the village. Coupled with the interactive nature of the process, PLA has been an empowering experience, especially for women. Among women it was a liberating experience for those with disabilities and the elderly who rarely or never were encouraged to participate in any community activities.

“In 2004, we did not know anything, we did not know the meaning of preparedness. Now thanks to the CBDP program, we know that preparedness means knowing the village like back of our hand” (women and men in Sippighat, women in Neil and Havelock Islands).

From the field research it emerged that people interpret preparedness with nuanced understanding. They know community preparedness means coming out of one's shell, and understand who are the most vulnerable. The new understanding of preparedness is not a self-centred concern. It has sunk into the consciousness of women and men that the elderly, children and people with disabilities, women and men without support, pregnant women etc. should be consciously included in the preparedness programs. The social mapping has proved to be a powerful tool to sensitize the community to the need of priority that should be accorded to the most vulnerable cases in the evacuation, relief distribution, camp management and protection.

The very idea of vulnerability is something new to the community. Knowing who is relatively more vulnerable to the disaster has created empathetic attitude towards those who need the support most.

“For the first time we know how during the evacuation, and distribution of relief we should give priority to those who need special attention either due to their physical conditions-- children, pregnant women, the elderly, and people with disability etc. or due to gender-based discrimination, i.e., widows, divorced, and deserted women” Says Chaman Bihari, the ward member of Sippighat.

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The remarkable change that the community has experienced is in relation to persons with disability(PWD). Prior to CBDP, they lived a hidden existence. No one wanted to share information on PWD with the result that they had very rare opportunity to come out of their houses. They lived a sort of stigmatised existence. Not so now.

“It was as though they saw light for the first time, never their existence was recognized, their problems understood and their capacities recognized” said Vinodini Shikdhar, an Anganwadi worker in Havelock. “Most of us in our groups are aware of their special needs, and the necessity to prioritise their needs in times of calamities” adds Savithri Mondal in the Neil Island.

The changed attitude toward people with disability, is not confined to the calamities but has prepared the communities to mainstream them. Attempts have been made to integrate women with disability, in the women’s SHGs and task force. Women with physical disability are encouraged to come out both by the CRPs and the women’s groups themselves.

Women with disability are more motivated, as they have found skills to save themselves and others. This for them is an empowering experience. They know they will not be helpless if aware of the ways to proactively cope with the disasters. Vinodini Shikdhar in Radha Nagar, Havelock has shown to the village that even with the locomotive disability, she can dare be a member of the rescue team . It was her own choice.

“ I no longer feel helpless now. I know I can save myself and save others too’.

According to the **Pradhans** of Neil and Sippighat, the project has been able to spread the message for the need for a culture of preparedness among the communities and the local panchayats, especially among women, who hitherto remained excluded from the consultation process of any program.

The woman Panchayat Pradhan of Sippighat pointed out that PLA was instrumental in breaking the myths that disaster affects everyone in the equal measures. The Vulnerability concept, she says, once understood can be applied to anything to make the areas safer. It can be physical, Commissioned by CARE, India, this study was carried out by Chaman Pincha, Gender Reseacher and Consultant, with support from Shakeb Nabi , Progam Manager, Tsunami Response Program Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Care India.

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mental, social and geographical vulnerabilities. For example, in Sippighat, women whose houses are atop the hills, realize the vulnerabilities due to lack of safe roads and absence of lights. These factors aggravate the sex specific and gender based vulnerabilities (for example pregnant or the elderly, children walking down the steep pathways, or medical emergencies during the night). To this politically active woman, PLA points to the need for integrating structural major of mitigation into CBDP program. CBDP according to her should encompass the entire gamut of safe existence.

The Dilemma

One outcome which is mentioned by the staff and CRPs with a sense of worry and bewilderment is that as women's participation is increasing, men's participation in CBDP program has seen a decrease. It is labelled as women's program and most meetings see overwhelming participation of women relative to men. Another concern raised by the staff is that as women are participating more actively in the CBDP program, there is a likelihood that their work burden would increase.

What then should be the way out? Does it signal that women should not be so actively involved in the program? Have men withdrawn from participating in the meetings? If yes, what may be the reason? Do women themselves think it is a burden to be actively engaged in the program? In what way and what capacities women and men want to participate in the program? How their interest in the program can be kept alive? In other words, how the program can be carried out in such a way that the sense of fatigue is not felt?

These issues were explored in half a day's workshop with the CRPs as well as in the interaction with the men and women during the field visit.

For the lead question "do you think women's workburden has increased due to their participation in the CBDP program" four choices were given to the participants. They were asked to group themselves in terms of their answers in the form of Yes, yes but, no and no but

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A large number of participants had opted for **yes** but, while none opted for **no but**...

The group who chose for **yes** listed out several reasons for why they think women's work burden has increased. An analysis of the reasons show that the participation in the CBDP program was considered as additional work for women apart from their very busy schedule in homes and fields. There was an interesting reference of women carrying the pressure of the



negative attitude of the community which considers those who go out frequently from home as not so good women. It then adds to the psychological pressure that women go through, and yet come to attend the meetings. At times when there is no time available, men do not participate in the meetings and women come out of a sense of obligation because they have been approached too many times by the CRPs and do not want to disappoint them.

However, the analysis of the group response to 'yes but' also revealed that for women it is an enhancing experience rather than a burden to participate in the various meetings and skill building trainings of CBDP program. Especially valued are the skills of first aid which they can put to use in their day to day life. Rescue skills are looked upon with great respect. Women who are ready to give their time to train themselves in the skills of rescuing know that learning these skills outweighs the work burden. More often men cooperate in looking after the children and bringing food from outside, if women have to remain busy in the meetings. In some families there is now an acceptance that when women go out for the meeting, she may expect some support from the other family members including spouse.

The low level of participation of men though seem to correlate with women's participation, has perhaps different reasons pertaining to timings and strategies to mobilise the communities. One factor mentioned recurrently in the workshop was that after a few initial meetings where there is

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action component or knowledge mapping, men generally are bored and do not find much meaning in the meetings.

The field research attempted to look into how much is the role of women in deciding what goes in the contingency planning?

Inspite of their numbers, women reported they are not aware of what has gone in the contingency planning nor they seem to be aware of what exactly goes in a contingency plan. The men take over where decision making power is exercised such as creating social maps and resource maps, where symbols of knowledge and power are held, such as paper and pen. In a mixed setting, very few women speak according to women of Havelock and Neil. However, it cannot be generalised. In Sippighat collaborative spaces are being promoted and women and men sitting together for meeting is now accepted. During the field work it what was considered most useful is the location of each house relative to one's own houses. It has underlined that when women and men sit together to deliberate and negotiate, it makes both gender to see each other's perspectives and opens up possibilities for negotiations, sometimes even tough negotiations. Especially in a program where the entire community needs to work together in an emergency situation, creation of the proactive collaborative spaces ensures effective co-ordination to meet the emergency needs of the diverse groups.

“According to their capacities and willingness” was the output received from the workshop for how the task forces are being constituted. The often used “According to their capacity and willingness” pushes more women in first aid and psycho-social counselling and men in the rescue, coordination and carcass disposal task forces.

These role allocation are based on the traditional gender roles which assigns women caring tasks at home, and public domain and the highly prized skills to men. The gender roles also inhibites women and men to choose for the rescue and other groups which demands non traditional skills. For example, psycho social counselling task force are mainly composed of women as they are considered more tolerant and empathetic. However the same practice disadvantages men from

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accessing psycho social counseling from women. Likewise if women are not given equal space in the rescue task force, and coordinating committees, they lose opportunities to learn the crucial skills and exercise leadership that these highly valued skills and roles entail. Not all the task force involve women in equal proportion. While it is significant to note that in Sippighat there is an equal proportion of women and men in the rescue team, in other areas this proportion is not maintained. Either women are considered physically unfit to perform such roles or it is assumed that she may not be willing to take upon such roles.

The groups discussion revealed that women put a high premium on these skills and feel a sense of security when they or women in their neighbourhood have learnt these skills. The reasons all women as well as men described was of more pragmatic nature. Women can save women more easily. It is more likely that women do not let other men touch them for rescue as there is a cultural taboo of letting other men touch a woman's body. This reflects in women's unwillingness to accept succor from men. Once a team of women rescuer is ready, so many women would feel safe as they can receive help from other women without any hesitation.

Many women feel a lacunae in their roles in the participation of CBDP process. It is the monopoly of the task force, says Gauri Haldhar of Sippighat. Can a handful of task force carry out the entire rescue operations, or a handful of women trained in the first aid attend to other women adequately? Was the intelligent question posed by her.

What is needed is the increased participation of women in learning the real skills, rather than just attending the meetings and hearing about the task force. In a family all adults—men, women, boys and girls should be equipped with at least essential rescue and first aid skills to help themselves and others. Women also tend to relate these skills to day to day's safety and caring roles.

“The skills are crucially needed, as we are surrounded by water and there is a high risk of earthquake in the region. After the tsunami whether we are affected or not we are all

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traumatised..we know disaster can happen any time and we have to remain in the state of ever readiness”(FGDs in the areas visited).

Another factor which was mentioned both in the focus group discussions in all three areas as well as in the workshop was the time at which meetings are called. It was reported that more men would turn up if meetings are organised in the evening hours. One of the factors which emerged about the non or irregular participation of men is that they would prefer spending their time in socialising and drinking than attend meetings. A careful analysis shows that as against varied means which men have to socialise, women have very few. In Neil Island women report that their mobility is very restricted. They hardly move out of the house and farms attached to their houses. CBDP meetings with their vibrancy and new knowledge have given space to them in the public domain. This is not only a way of learning new information and skills but a creative way of socialising too.

“There is immense joy, when we come to the meetings. We groom ourselves personally, we find spring in our feet while walking towards the meeting venue”.(Minouti Das, Neil Island).

CBDP platform thus has intrinsic value for most women.

Women’s perception of the participation

Women’s work load may have increased, but so is the sense of empowerment and joy of participating in a collaborative activity which brings them in the public domain. Since CBDP is integrated into the ICDS and micro credit programs, the meetings at ICDS(Integrated Child Development Service) and for SHGs(Self Help Groups) include the theme of disaster preparedness to reduce the time constraints on women. Men being more mobile have multiple means to gather information, but not so for women. Since it is a right of the community to know about their rights in the times of emergency, women are being encouraged to attend the awareness building meetings. The program benefits from the participation of women immensely

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as it has been seen that women do share information in detail with other women and their families. They also talk about CBDP in their group meetings.

“I do not feel work burden; even otherwise we will have our group meetings for micro savings and credit. The difference between the two is qualitative. In the SHG meeting prior to CBDP we will just talk about micro credit alone and do some small savings. After we have initiated into CBDP, we learn something new, something which enhances our self esteem and make us strong within.”

The sense of power within women like Aarthy, Paro Mondal, Susila speaks volumes about how powerful the program can be if scaled up and grounded in new perspectives. Arthy for one feels proud rather than overburdened.

The positive impact of women’s participation on the CBDP program can be captured by the points given below:

1. Women have come out from the households to gain awareness which they are actively spreading in the community.
2. They have become united which has given a solid base for any CBDP activities to be disseminated.
3. Some collaborative spaces have been created, such as task force and meetings for PLA process. The PLA process proved that women are knowledgeable about the landscape of the village. The reason is that women are closely related with the natural resources and other social infrastructure. They go to collect firewood and water, to drop their children for anganwadis, take the children to the hospitals etc.
4. Muslim women who remain confined to the household are now taking active interests in the activity of the task force.
5. The dependence of women on menfolk for their survival has reduced.

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The role of women cannot be analysed in isolation without taking into consideration the role of men in the process of CDBP.

It is mostly for the meetings and awareness raising programs that women's number are seen on the higher side. Sometimes men do look at the skills acquired by women in a condescending way.

When I tell my husband about how I have gained the skills, he jokes:

So you can save the world?

Or Ok so what would be the use of all that?

“Men rarely learn from us, they think if we know something it must be just the worth of a woman's knowledge”(*Inputs from FGD with women in Neil Island*).

What women have gained from this program is a heightened awareness of their own worth, a thirst for knowledge and a passion for more such training for them as well as their children. They have started thinking critically, though a bit hesitantly. They have also started wondering about the absurdity of gender weighing on using the opportunity to enhance their knowledge and skills.

A muslim woman (Name withheld) in Tylorabad wants to learn swimming through CDBP, because she knows the importance of it in the event of disasters like floods and Tsunamis. She brings a set of Salwar(a loose pants for women and a top)., She removes her Burqua and Saree, puts on Salwar and top and swims. Before going home, she wears the Burqua again and leaves.

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This is how she negotiates with the restrictions imposed on Muslim women. She has already learnt to swim and very proud of it(related by Sharaft Ali, CRP, Sippy Ghat).

In Sippighat women have become acutely aware of the necessity of building a pressure group to set their devastated lives right. This political awareness is grounded in their experience of having seen delays in compensation of the lost crop and submerged lands. The acutely difficult condition in which they live without basic civic amenities, and good roads, have made them interpret disaster in a broader framework. “ Life here is an everyday disaster”. The steep way down the hill to get onto the road is an every day encounter of risk for children, the elderly and the pregnant women, especially in the nights and after the rains when the sand turns into slush. Flash floods are the possibilities there and evacuations routes are equally difficult.

Non-traditional skills for women

While women have learnt and want to learn skills which traditionally fall in the domain of men, such as swimming, high building rescue, rescue in the water through rope, tying different knots, there is no training, even at the discourse level for men in the essential skills of survival which fall in the domain of women: cooking, cleaning, and caring for the children and the elderly. In an emergency situation, these skills are needed from both women and men to pull the threads together in the initial days of crisis.

The task force members have learnt how to prepare ORS(Oral Rehydration Solution) and purify water. Women in Sippy Gaht especially consider this knowledge as important as rescue skills.

“When we were all crowded in the school in th eaftermath of Tsunami, children had diarrreoh and we did not know what to do; we remained helpless. Purifying water, and preparing ORS are

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skills which all adults in the family should know; these are the skills we can use in both crisis and non-crisis times”.

The awareness raising exercise has linked the preparedness with basic civic amenities. Women now have started participating actively in Panchayat meetings to dialogue and negotiate with the panchayat for entitlements of basic civic amenities such as garbage management, drinking water, electricity, sanitation, and safe road etc.

The awareness of disaster and how to cope with it in the initial phase has been found useful by both women and men. However, since women attend the CBDP meetings regularly, the awareness is integrated into their day to day conversation with friends and family members.

“We never thought of disaster and the likely consequences that we may face. Now we are well aware of it though in Neil we did not face disaster. The tsuanmi whether we are affected or not, shocked everyone and the CBDP has shown the way” (FGD, in Neil Island).

“We were in a state of readiness to accept this program. Especially in the areas like Sippighat which still sufferes from the long term impact of the tsunami, it has become an active discourse. Whether we are supported by NGO or not, the community needs to sustain the prepredness agenda, refine it further through regular simulation exercise and expanding the program to sustain the interest in the theme.Especially in the areas which are neither affected by the tsuanmi or have faced any sort of disaster in the recent past”(Chaman Bihari, the Ward Member, Sippy Gaht).

3

Conclusions

Insights

This section presents a few suggestions based on the analysis of the field information. Though the study is area specific, the lessons that emerged from it can be applied to any disaster management program, including CBDP across states. The insights presented here have also important implications for shaping up policies and translating them into implementation. Reflection on the following insights in any disaster management policy or program would help enhance the quality of women's participation in an effective way:

1. It is not enough to gauge women's participation through head counts, though the importance of presence of women in large number in the CBDP program cannot be discounted. What is important is to have policies and systems in place to ensure that women's strategic gender needs are taken into consideration (significant representation of women in decision making bodies, across task forces and VDMC. leadership training for women, awareness of their rights, and building strong women's collectives). It demands a process which is integrated into the development programs .
2. Just overwhelming number of women in a meeting may not ensure meaningful participation of all women. It is possible that a few women alone participate in the meeting. There need to be equitable distribution of opportunity for learning necessary skills for all, rather than a few women. In fact trained women should train other women in the similar skills; this would remove a sense of ennui and 'they- know –and- we- do-

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not know feelings' which may produce a sense of apartness and resentment among them. After all community preparedness means the entire community has necessary skills.

3. Children's capacities could be leveraged to get them involved and thus educate them on CBDP. For example, children may be involved in preparing the Child Survival Kits and help their mothers to get the Family Survival Kits ready. Children should be able to make meaning out of the PLA exercise and should know about the safe and vulnerable places. They may also be trained in simple first-aid skills including preparing ORS etc. On the line of children's Panchayat, a networking of children may be initiated by CBDP where children may like to share their anxieties, needs and skills. This would also reduce work burden and anxieties of women.
4. In any disaster management program, strategies need to be evolved to foreground the skills to manage the household chores, including cooking, caring for the children, the sick and elderly as life skills. These skills should be imparted as part of the CBDP programs, especially to men and boys. This would also address the problem of increased work burden of women, especially in the times of disaster.
5. Gender and leadership training of the government officials at district and PRI levels need to be integrated as part of the CBDP process. While the gender and disaster training would help them to understand why a gender perspective is needed in policy making process, program designing and implementation, the leadership training to women PRI members would give them necessary confidence to articulate how gender sensitive interventions can be incorporated in any program in the context of both development and disasters.
6. Non traditional skills training for women not only equip them with the critical skills and bring them into the public domain, it also helps in transforming the perceptions of the community towards women. Likewise, non traditional skills training for men and boys i.e, managing household chores, childcare, first aid, caring for the sick etc.—not yet a part of CBDP programs anywhere, would help them to understand crucial importance of these skills for post disaster survival.

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