

Gender and Disaster Risk Management in Food and Agriculture: lessons learnt from FAO projects in Niger, Afghanistan and Indonesia

Natural disasters, conflicts and emergency situations in general, can have different impacts on women and men, young and old. Disasters tend to have the most severe consequences on vulnerable and agriculturally-dependent women and men, typically living in poverty, that are not often able to cope with the consequences of disasters. The systematic approach aimed at lessening the adverse impacts of hazards and the likelihood of disaster is called Disaster Risk Management (DRM). This approach has been conceived to address matters related to natural disasters but it can also be applied to agricultural threats and emergencies due to conflict or transboundary animal and plant pests and diseases.

FAO is actively involved in DRM interventions as food and agriculture can play a key role in increasing community resilience to likely threats. FAO aims at strengthening the livelihoods and increasing the resilience of households and communities in the pre-disaster phase, through measures to avoid (prevention) or limit (mitigation) the adverse effects of hazards and to provide timely and reliable hazard forecasts (preparedness). FAO focuses on saving lives and property in the response phase. FAO recovery and rehabilitation interventions, post-disaster or crisis, are based on the *building back better* principle. Building back better is to focus on ways to increase resilience to future hazards through longer-term interventions that facilitate the transition from relief to development.

Gender differentiated impact of disasters

Gender differences can make women more vulnerable than men to natural disasters in those contexts where they have less access to productive assets, especially land. For example, discrimination based on gender in terms of access to formally recognized property rights, as well as customary tenure systems, increases women's vulnerability to the impacts of climate related disasters like drought.

FAO completed a baseline assessment (November 2009) to review the gender implications of DRM interventions and to develop key recommendations to more effectively and

systematically include gender analysis and considerations in the design and implementation of FAO DRM projects. Good practice for gender-sensitive DRM projects were identified based on the following criteria: projects (1) focused on the application of gender-sensitive tools; (2) relied on one or more gender experts/consultants; (3) promoted gender analysis; and (4) provided training on gender and DRM.

Niger: increasing the land tenure rights of women

Recent projects in Niger, Afghanistan and Indonesia provide good practice examples. For FAO emergency and rehabilitation interventions in Niger, women account for 80 percent of the total beneficiaries of all projects, especially those involving off-season activities and the distribution of small ruminants. Women's access to land and water has been improved through leases of land to women's groups. The land tenure rights of these beneficiaries were secured for periods longer than five years by the Decentralised Land Commissions (*Commissions Foncières – COFOs*), which is significant in that women typically do not have property rights or land tenure security.

Afghanistan: strengthening women's technical skills

More than 25 years of war, recent prolonged droughts and environmental degradation in Afghanistan have heightened concerns

about growing food insecurity and poverty. From a gender perspective focused on reducing and managing disaster risk, FAO nutrition programmes are aimed at strengthening women's technical skills by working in partnership with organizations that assist women to organize themselves in self-help groups in order to better access credit, markets and develop small businesses.

Indonesia: improve knowledge and communication with farmers

Highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) has assumed epidemic proportions since late 2003 in Indonesia. FAO has recently started to promote the understanding of gender relations in livestock raising as a key factor in designing HPAI related interventions including training, communication materials and monitoring systems. FAO has made efforts to improve knowledge and communication with farmers and these initiatives need to be sustained by improving the training of key project staff in gender sensitive approaches, including pre-test techniques for communication and outreach.

Lessons learnt

The lessons learned and key recommendations from Niger, Indonesia and Afghanistan can be summarized in six key messages:

1. Promoting women's control over assets in the transition phase following an emergency is crucial: at this stage, support to women's entrepreneurship improves household food security standards.
2. Reduction and eventual removal of discrimination in women's access to land and property is fundamental to reducing women's as well as communities' vulnerability to natural disasters.
3. Gender analysis is the basis of effective targeting of beneficiaries as it strengthens planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and makes programmes and projects more efficient and relevant.





Women's Group in Niger.

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4. Strengthening women's technical skills in food processing can help them improve household food availability and income: nutrition is a good entry point to address gender issues as it is culturally acceptable even in countries where women are segregated and excluded from public life.
5. Supporting women's groups in DRM interventions is essential: low-income women who have lost everything can form groups and become active participants in the relief and recovery process.
6. Gender analysis around HPAI issues is important for ensuring that risk reduction strategies consider women's role in the poultry sector; successful outcomes of these measures will depend on long-term structural changes in gender dynamics.

More gender mainstreaming in DRM

FAO is actively seeking ways to more systematically address gender issues to improve FAO DRM interventions, and the examples discussed above are a small sample of the many types of interventions focused on food, agriculture, gender and emergency response, rehabilitation and development programming. FAO has launched a new FAO corporate strategy on improving emergency preparedness and making emergency response more effective. A more enhanced

focus on gender analysis and identifying the gender-differentiated needs and capacities of women and men will play an increasingly important role in improving how FAO implements and delivers results under its new corporate strategy. FAO agrees with the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) in that a gender-inclusive approach to DRM can achieve win-win results for families and communities.

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Distribution of chickens in Haiti.