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**Capacity-Building Programme on Gender, Poverty and Employment**

**GPE Guide Series**

***POVERTY AND EMPLOYMENT IN CRISIS SITUATIONS:  
THE GENDER DIMENSIONS***

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**InFocus Programme on Crisis Response and Reconstruction**

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The National Policy Group, Policy Integration Department publish two sets of GPE information and training resources that complement the Modular Package on Gender, Poverty and Employment (ILO, 2000):

GPE Guide Series - provides information on recent trends, perspectives or topics not covered by the Modular Package and have inter-regional relevance.

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## Contents

	Page
<b>Introductory Note</b> .....	<b>v</b>
<b>A. Crises and poverty: Vulnerability to crises and its gender dimension</b> .....	<b>1</b>
A.1 Crises affect differently women and men, girls and boys .....	1
A.2 During crises the roles of men and women change .....	6
<b>B. Approaches and strategies</b> .....	<b>8</b>
B.1 Employment promotion .....	9
B.2 Social safety nets, social security and protection .....	12
B.3 Other gender aspects in crisis response .....	13
<b>C. Guide for action</b> .....	<b>16</b>
C.1 Mainstreaming gender at the preparedness and planning phase .....	17
C.2 Ensuring gender-fairness in crisis interventions .....	17
C.3 Policy Framework .....	19
C.4 Overall Concerns .....	19
<b>Conclusions</b> .....	<b>19</b>
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	<b>21</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	<b>22</b>
Boxes:	
Box 1: Invisibility of women’s work and contributions to income in crisis and post-crisis periods .....	6
Box 2: Women and the labour market in East European Transition Economies .....	8
Box 3: A window of opportunity for social justice in post-crisis periods .....	9
Box 4: LO InFocus Programme on Crisis Response and Reconstruction .....	14
Box 5: Providing women “male” skills to rebuild flooded communities: Chokwe (Mozambique) .....	15
Box 6: Multi-skilling women in post-earthquake reconstruction: Gujarat (India) .....	15
Box 7: ILO Quick Impact and Medium Term Work in Afghanistan .....	16

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## Introductory Note

The impact of armed conflicts, natural disasters, financial and economic downturns, and difficult political and social transitions is devastating, falls unfairly on the weakest and already vulnerable groups, and poses a major threat to prospects for decent work for women and men. The deterioration of employment and increase in poverty are common elements of crises, and determine the ability of individuals and societies to rebuild a “normal”, decent life. Women and men experience, and respond to, these effects differently.

This Guide focuses on employment and poverty in the context of crises from a gender perspective. It presents a range of approaches and strategies for tackling gender dimensions of crises and post-crisis reconstruction, reviews lessons learned from experience, and proposes guidelines for action. Recent examples of interventions illustrate the main issues discussed. Finally, a list of selected reading materials is suggested.

Although this Guide can be used on its own, it has been prepared to complement the *Modular Package on Gender, Poverty and Employment, Reader’s Kit* (2000). This Guide makes reference to specific modules of the Modular Package, highlights the relevance of the analysis and strategies presented in these modules, and identifies the specific practical and strategic needs created by a crisis situation, as well as the challenges posed by the gender dimensions of crises.

The GPE Guide Series is a publication of the National Policy Group of the Policy Integration Department as a contribution to the ILO Capacity-Building Programme on Gender, Poverty and Employment and to ILO initiatives on decent work, poverty reduction and PRSPs.

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## **A. Crises and poverty: Vulnerability to crises and its gender dimension**

The term ‘crises’ covers a variety of situations where the functioning of a society is seriously disrupted, causing widespread human, material or environmental losses, which exceed the ability of that society to cope using its own resources. Evidence from around the world indicates that crises increase poverty, deteriorate working conditions, expand the feminisation of poverty, worsen employment and income-generating opportunities, reduce productive assets, and erode social integration, social protection and human security.

Whether classified as natural disasters, armed conflicts, financial and economic downturns, or difficult social and political transitions, crises always reflect the economic and social structure of societies and their level of development. In particular, they affect disproportionately the weakest and already marginalized, and also create new vulnerable groups. Vulnerability to crises results from deep-rooted factors within society, including poverty, population pressure, social exclusion, unequal economic opportunities, absence of social dialogue, and lack of access to resources and basic services. Some groups such as women, the elderly, children, members of subordinated cultural or racial groups, and other socially marginalized groups, tend to be the most vulnerable as they have the least access to or control over resources needed to cope with and overcome crises.

### **A.1 Crises affect differently women and men, girls and boys**

Being a primary determinant of social organization, gender shapes the social environment within which crises occur. A crisis affects differently women and men, boys and girls, because society ascribes different roles and responsibilities to them. The gendered division of labour within households and in the economy makes most women less able to control economic resources and mitigate the effects of crises than most men. The higher incidence of poverty among women, their secondary status within the labour force, their predominance in the informal economy, their lesser access to productive assets and to information, and their extensive domestic responsibilities, clearly make them economically vulnerable long before a crisis occurs. Module 1, on “Trends, Issues and Approaches: An Overview”, offers an in-depth analysis of these issues. Gender perceptions and social norms are also shaping men’s roles as breadwinners and protectors and influencing their ability to cope with crises and post-crises situations. It is important to note that not all women are disadvantaged as not all men better off. Women and men are not homogeneous groups. Besides gender, class, race, religion, ethnicity, age and ability are equally important factors that influence the impact of crises.

In spite of the different nature and causes of crises, their impact on men and women reveals some general patterns:

- Economic insecurity increases due to the loss of productive assets, reduced access to goods and services and decreasing employment and income

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opportunities. Women are more likely than men to lose jobs and work time; their small businesses are hard hit; and their household entitlements may decline.

- Working conditions deteriorate due to decreasing wage levels and benefits, lack of coverage by standard labour legislation, and increasing job insecurity. Women's working conditions, both in paid and unpaid work, also deteriorate, for reasons such as lack of child-care and increased workload due to damaged infrastructure, housing and workplaces, for example.
- Women's workload increases dramatically in relation to men's. To compensate the decline in household income, women often take on more wage employment or other forms of income-generating work and also engage in various new forms of "crisis works", including emergency response and political organizing. Cutbacks in social benefits and expanded responsibilities are overloading women's time budgets, as they increasingly assume care for children, the elderly and the disabled.
- Education opportunities decrease, affecting particularly already disadvantaged female children due to the additional constraints on household budgets and increased demands on their time in the household. Also, more girls and boys tend to be pulled out of school and pushed into the work force, to complement household budgets.
- Women recover more slowly than men from major economic losses as they are less mobile, likely to return to paid work later, and often fail to receive equitable financial recovery assistance from the government and/or external donors.
- Demographic patterns and household structure change in crisis-affected areas. The adult male population decreases as a result of army mobilization, migration, disability or death. The number of women heads of households increases, and women become sole providers and caregivers. The decrease in adult male population has various other gender effects. For example, since land and labour arrangements are usually negotiated through men, women may lose access to both in their absence.
- Gender roles change during crises, as some women and men are able to step out of their socially ascribed roles by accepting different survival strategies to respond to the requirements of crisis situations.
- Stress and psychological trauma increase in crises and post-crisis periods. Such traumas are often inadequately addressed and may influence people's capacity for productive work. The few services available tend to target women rather than men.
- Men's inability to live up to the ideals of masculinity affects their capacity to cope with crises and reintegrate into society, which in turn may also have negative consequences on domestic life.

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- Post-crisis recovery rarely builds upon positive changes in gender roles that often occur during crises. Instead of facilitating the breakdown of gender stereotypes, it tends to return to pre-conflict patterns that impede women's advancement in the economic, political and social spheres.

Different types of crises also bear specific impacts on men and women.

***Armed conflicts:***

Armed conflicts usually stem from a combination of socio-political or socio-economic tensions, rooted in deeply-embedded problems such as imperialism, colonialism and historical conflicts; struggles to control valuable natural resources; economic growth failures; ethnic rivalry and social exclusion.

- The technology of modern warfare renders civilians potential targets. Women and children constitute nowadays the majority of conflict victims, as well as the majority of refugees and internally displaced.
- Conflict often disrupts education and training through the destruction of educational facilities, the death and migration of educators, and restrictions on mobility. This can limit further girls' already restricted access to education. At the same time, new opportunities can open up, as refugee women and girls may receive at their places of asylum, the education they would not have had access to. As for boys, their enrolment in schools can decrease as they often get drafted into the army at a young age.
- Conflict-affected countries undergo demographic changes generated by death, displacement, migration and fluctuating birth rates. There is a decrease in the adult male population and an increase in women heads of households, with the associated soaring levels of poverty and other vulnerabilities. The dependency ratio increases as well as women's work burden, with the large number of orphaned children and war disabled that women have to care for in addition to the elderly and their own children. Further, traditional gender roles dictate that women be the primary health-care providers for their families, a responsibility made more difficult by lack of services and funds to pay for medicinal treatment in conflict and post-conflict contexts. The time required to look after the increased numbers of sick household members restricts women's mobility and detracts from the time they could dedicate to productive activities.
- The role men and women play in conflicts is too often considered in binary and adversarial terms – men as aggressors, women as victims. In reality, both men and women gain and lose during conflicts, although not to the same extent. For instance, some women participate in war as combatants, yet demobilization programmes continue targeting men to the exclusion of female ex-combatants and kin of demobilized soldiers. The particular needs and issues of female veterans are left out of demobilization programmes and packages in many post-conflict developing countries.

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- The incidence of stress and psychological trauma increases during conflicts and in their immediate aftermath. The trauma experienced during exposure to violence is often compounded by the break-up of support networks and the loss of livelihoods. Often it is also addressed inadequately, which reduces affected people's capacity for productive work. The few services available tend to target women more than men. Lack of adequate services for men's trauma has been identified as one of the factors behind the increase in domestic violence after conflicts.
  - Women are disproportionately affected by the adjustment policies for economic recovery in post-conflict societies. For example, they might lose their livelihoods in the privatization of agricultural land. Module 3, on "Access to Assets", deals with this issue in greater detail.
  - Women's rights and gender issues as a whole are usually not put on the political agenda nor seen in relation to conflict. Women are noticeably absent from peace negotiations and rarely found in decision-making structures or transitional governments in countries emerging from conflict. Consequently, their influence in forging policies is constrained. Peace negotiations and agreements are commonly gender-blind, and therefore fail to establish a framework for mainstreaming gender into reintegration and reconstruction of all aspects of society, thus creating potential for further marginalization of women.

***Natural disasters:***

Natural disasters arise when a sudden onset of destructive natural forces such as an earthquake, a flood or tropical cyclone, impact human beings and their environment, resulting in the loss of life, infrastructure and employment opportunities. Slow-onset disasters such as drought and deforestation are equally insidious. Their effects build up over time, leading to an erosion in life quality and livelihoods, and contributing to other types of crisis.

- Disasters disrupt commerce and markets, destroy productive resources and infrastructure, and make workers' lives more difficult throughout the crisis period and beyond.
- Self-employed and home workers, oftentimes women, lose vital workplace and supplies in such disasters.
- Farmers lose food security when disasters destroy their land, seeds and livestock. Women, who frequently lack land rights or farm small plots, are especially vulnerable and may be forced off the land entirely.
- Women's household power weakens as their assets are depleted; their income-earning options are downgraded; and their mobility restricted. Household entitlements may be contested, leaving women with limited control over the income they earn or highly dependent on food provision from men, for example.

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- Gender biases in investment policies during the reconstruction phase may also deter women's recovery. Targeting relief funds to male-dominated employment projects in construction, debris removal, or landscaping, supports the economic recovery of men but disadvantages women who also need income support.

***Financial and economic downturns:***

Financial and economic downturns are often characterized by drastic declines in real GDP growth; falls in equity prices and output; very high inflation rates; and sharp drops in exchange rates, consumption and incomes.

- Financial and economic downturns typically lead to contractions in the economy and increases in absolute poverty, income inequality, open unemployment, underemployment and vulnerability of already disadvantaged groups.
- Job losses affect women and men in almost all economic sectors and in both urban and rural areas. However, women tend to lose their jobs first and in larger numbers than men, like in the case of the Southeast and East Asia financial and economic crisis. The disproportional lay-offs can be attributed to several factors: high women's labour participation in the most severely affected industries; women's concentration in the least secure types of wage employment; and the perception of women as secondary income earners. As husbands are expected to provide income for the household, some employers first dismiss married women.
- Employment becomes more casual. Large numbers of laid-off workers enter the informal economy, which is characterized by low productivity, low wages, and poor working conditions. Also, employers substitute permanent full-time wageworkers with a more flexible and precarious workforce, in which women are over-represented.
- Women are especially vulnerable in countries where they are already disadvantaged and discriminated at the work place.
- Reductions in public and social services further depress women's economic security, causing them greater difficulties to recover from financial and economic crises.
- Women's participation in labour movements and workers' organizations tends to be very limited. Crises further decrease women workers' bargaining power, imposing additional difficulties to defend their rights.

***Difficult social and political transitions:***

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Transition from a centrally-planned to a market-oriented economy, or from one type of political regime to another, for example, are frequently accompanied by recession, inefficiency, bankruptcy, lack of foreign investment, and unemployment.

- Women's economic security decreases as they tend to be more affected by the erosion of service provision, declining political participation and the re-emergence of traditional patriarchal attitudes and beliefs.
- Public expenditure constraints also have direct impact on women's employment and working conditions in countries where they were highly represented in public-sector occupations. They suffer decreased employment opportunities and job losses, or considerably lower wages.
- Usually men are less able to cope with the loss of gains and status they enjoyed in the previous system; and oftentimes resort to alcoholism, drug abuse and suicides. The difference in life expectancy between men and women increases; reaching, for example in Russia, 14 years. This affects men's aptitude for employment and puts additional burden on the households.

## **A.2 During crises the roles of men and women change**

Changes in gender roles may occur during crises, as men and women adopt different strategies to cope with them. That often means breaking away from their socially ascribed roles. Some of those strategies are empowering and have a positive impact on the position of women in society, increasing their economic independence and their ability to provide for their families. Others are more problematic and pose challenges, for instance because they are not (yet) socially unacceptable. The absence of male income support and labour forces women to undertake income-generating activities and assume male tasks, which represent an even more fundamental change in gender relations and societal norms. For example, during the conflict in Mozambique, agricultural tasks performed by men such as clearing and marketing were assumed by rural women, which gave them greater access to and control over income and surpluses. In some cases, however, these changes had longer-term negative consequences. The assumption of these activities sometimes resulted in divorce upon return of husbands. In Guatemala, during the conflict women workers who were heads of their households were perceived as loose and prey to sexual advances.

Other survival strategies are not positive or empowering, and can be dangerous. Prostitution is one example. For women who see their body as their only resource, prostitution becomes the only way to provide for their families. This was noted in Mozambique, where the influx of international troops increased the demand for prostitution. While women may have been able to sustain their families, their long-term vulnerability increased as a result of their socially stigmatized practice and physical endangerment, as well as exposure to sexually transmitted diseases including AIDS.

*Box 1*

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**Invisibility of women's work and contributions to income  
In crisis and post-crisis periods**

Most of women's productive work is often invisible, as it is carried out within the household (subsistence) production system and therefore usually regarded as an extension of their household duties. Even when home-based work is designed for the market, it is hidden from public view and statistical accounting since it does not take the formal character of wage employment or independent enterprise. This is explained in greater detail in Module 1, on "Trends, Issues and Approaches: an Overview".

In crisis-affected countries the number of women working at home or in the informal economy increases. Women's family labour plays an important role in crises and post-crisis recovery, as it often represents the only available social safety net. Yet, their lack of visibility may prevent them from receiving assistance to improve their productivity and hence increase their income, along with their family's welfare. Gender biases are likely to restrict the demand for female labour to stereotyped occupations (sewing, knitting, cooking), thus often preventing women from taking advantage of opportunities emerging from reconstruction activities. In agriculture, for example, this may entail the maintenance of a gender division between subsistence farming (for women) and commercial farming (for men), despite the actual work women perform, restricting further women's entry into more profitable activities. As for training, the courses offered to women during and after crises often reflect their domestic functions, and are not closely linked to business and other opportunities emerging in the post-crisis labour market.

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*Box 2*

**Women and the labour market in East European Transition Economies**

Of the estimated 26 million jobs lost during transition in the 1990s, data suggest that women lost almost 14 million. In Hungary, women lost one-third of their jobs, while men one-fourth. In Poland, women lost 1.6 million jobs. In Russia, they lost 7 million jobs between 1990 and 1995, while men 1 to 2 million. In some countries, evidence indicates that after the economy started to recover, women continued to lose their jobs while men were able to seize new opportunities.

Unemployment was a new experience for the legions of women and men who lost their jobs. Both individuals and social systems have proved to be ill equipped to deal with such situation. Across the region, in the second half of the 1990s, female unemployment ranged from 5 to 15 percent (reaching 7-33 percent among younger women). In most countries, the share of long-term unemployed (those out of work for over a year) has continued to rise, and many jobless women (often with children) do not collect benefits either because they are not officially registered as unemployed, or because they have exhausted their entitlements.

It also seems that in transition economies women's economic opportunities are more closely tied to the shrinking rather than the growing sectors. Data show that they are strongly represented in fields likely to remain largely in the public sector – health care, education, social services and public administration. Although there are opportunities for private enterprises in some of these fields too, studies indicate that women have been slower to take up private-sector jobs. In this regard, the analysis finds some gender bias in recruitment among private employers, possibly due to the perception that female employment involves higher non-wage costs because of women's family responsibilities. In most countries, self-employment is more common among men than among women. Nonetheless, in those countries – mostly in the Southern part of the region – where private-sector agriculture has once again become an important part of the economy, more women than men appear to be self-employed. However, such work often offers few prospects; many of these self-employed women are struggling to earn a subsistence living, frequently by helping out on small farms or family plots. Women are also less likely than men to be entrepreneurs, although in nine countries surveyed women own or have started one-quarter of the new businesses.

*Source:* UNICEF, *Sixth Regional Report: Women in Transition*, Florence, International Child Development Center, 1999.

## **B. Approaches and strategies**

As nowadays crises occur more frequently, affect more people, and have more devastating effects, emergency management and international humanitarian relief and development agencies are moving to reduce vulnerabilities and help communities become more crisis-resilient. ILO's institutional capacity has also been expanded to provide a rapid and sustainable response to crises. ILO's InFocus Programme on Crisis Response and Reconstruction (IFP/CRISIS) focuses on the promotion of social dialogue and decent work before, during, and after crises.

A number of approaches and strategies have been developed to protect affected people from the effects of crises, as well as to reduce their future vulnerability. Expanding opportunities for women has proved essential to ensure equitable mitigation and crisis response; yet this is not yet fully reflected in the

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agenda of all committed agencies. In the case of natural disasters and armed conflicts in particular, the urgency of the situation is often used as an excuse for neglecting gender considerations.

*Box 3*

**A window of opportunity for social justice in post-crisis periods**

The post-crisis period offers a window of opportunity for advancing social justice, redressing inequalities and reducing vulnerabilities. Among others, it offers opportunities to break down old patterns of male dominance and to restructure decision-making processes. Thus, post-crisis reconstruction and, in the case of conflict, peace-building processes, should not create the *status quo ante* characterised by inequalities and exclusion that, moreover, are among the structural factors which triggered the crisis. Rather, they should capitalise on positive changes in gender roles; in particular, women's gains in access to employment, training, community decision-making, etc.

Building on empowering experiences can facilitate the breakdown of gender stereotypes that often impede women's advancement in the economic, political and social spheres. To date, programmes and projects have often failed to capitalise upon the changes in gender roles. Experience shows that in the case of conflict, for example, the return of peace often means a return of the traditional social structures and gender divisions.

Post-crisis recovery should therefore be guided by the overall principle of contributing to a more just and equitable society in which women and other previously marginalised groups become full players in the re-development of the country. Technical assistance programmes should facilitate such progress, rather than seek return to the *status quo ante*.

## **B.1 Employment promotion**

Employment promotion is crucial to improve the material welfare of crisis-affected groups. Employment provides an income, thereby reducing social vulnerability through increased economic capacity. But it also provides dignity, self-worth, membership in a society, hope and a stake in the future. It is thus critical for long-term social healing and socio-economic reintegration of crisis-affected groups, as well as for the reconstruction and economic recovery of their communities and states. Although determined by the needs, and therefore the nature of crises, the main response strategies include: employment-intensive infrastructure rehabilitation and construction, income-generating projects including micro-credit facilities, Local Economic Development and skills training.

### ***Employment-intensive infrastructure rehabilitation and construction***

This type of scheme is based on appropriate technologies and labour-intensive techniques that create massive immediate employment and income generation during a crisis and in the post-crisis period. Therefore, it contributes to long-term development as well as to instant stimulation of the local economy by providing

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access to markets and facilitating the circulation of information and other exchanges; thus helping both economic and social reconstruction.

Women benefit in particular from the reconstruction of education and health facilities and improvements in housing infrastructure, as this helps lighten their reproductive work. Yet the gender dimensions of this and other types of employment-promotion schemes are often ignored. Investment strategies focusing on physical reconstruction are likely to generate jobs for men at the expense of social reconstruction programmes that are likely to employ and benefit more women. Even when women are actively involved in public works, they are not part of the decision making and planning. As a consequence, their needs in infrastructure rehabilitation tend to be overlooked.

Women's participation in all phases of labour-intensive works can expand non-traditional work for both women and men. For example, women can acquire more marketable skills, or more investments can be made into social recovery which can in return also absorb male labour from manual work.

### ***Micro-enterprise and cooperative development***

This strategy that includes the development of financial and non-financial services (such as identification of business opportunities, improvement of market accessibility, and promotion of entrepreneurship), ensure the creation of opportunities for local employment. Local micro and small enterprise development also contributes to jump-start both the economic and the social processes disrupted by conflict.

The main challenges of this strategy, particularly in relation to women beneficiaries, are associated with the type of business, insufficient business training, advice and information. Newly created women's businesses are often gender-stereotyped (sewing, knitting, etc.) and yield low income. Because of the nature of their businesses, women are less likely to use the opportunities created by the reconstruction and recovery labour-intensive strategies.

Other factors, besides adequate training, market research and other social support for women entrepreneurs, that restrict women's and men's entrepreneurship, are related to the access and use of micro-credit. They too affect women. They are explained in depth in Module 4, on "Financial Resources for the Poor: Focus on Credits".

### ***Local Economic Development (LED)***

This is a participatory process that encourages social dialogue and public-private partnership in defined geographical areas. It enables local stakeholders to design and implement jointly a development strategy, by making use of the local, endogenous potential and comparative advantages of the area. The objective is to create decent jobs and to stimulate the local economy.

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The LED approach has several advantages in comparison to the traditional top-down policies or conventional community-based strategies. It enhances local ownership of the development process and fosters innovations by using local knowledge and capacities. Moreover, it addresses simultaneously different dimensions by supporting entrepreneurship, networking, institutional building and local investment. The strategies applied in LED include: a common definition of priorities; raising public awareness; strengthening locally-oriented capacities; rebuilding the community fabric; providing local community groups – women as well as men – with “a voice” and an opportunity to rebuild trust and community assets.

The ILO experience shows that this approach facilitates participation of women and men, as well as the building of bridges between different factions in society. It has been particularly successful in the case of conflict, where it can also contribute to peace building.

### ***Training***

Training activities cover a wide range of strategies aimed at enhancing individuals’ employability and their access to markets. A variety of training activities can be envisaged besides those provided to accompany labour-intensive reconstruction, micro-enterprise and cooperative development. Particularly important for crisis-affected populations are short skills and business training programmes, responding to changes in the labour market and opportunities for self-employment and wage-employment. Training to tackle specific needs of certain vulnerable groups can be also introduced, such as programmes for disabled people in post-conflict recovery.

The gender dimension of training programmes is often ignored. Programmes are more likely to focus on reinforcing traditional women occupations, such as sewing, with the already described consequences on women’s economic security. This and other important issues, approaches, and strategies related to poor people’s access to training are explained more in-depth in Module 5, on “Investing in Human Capital: Focus on Training”.

### ***Creating an enabling microeconomic, labour market and legal environment to promote access to productive activities***

The post-crisis phase is often characterized by the development of new macroeconomic and other national policies, and reviews of existing laws and their application. This is undertaken either to mitigate the effects of crises, or to restore more thoroughly the national economies and systems. In conflict-affected countries, for example, these measures can be related to the reformulation of property rights and redistribution of land to ex-combatants. Another example is the dismantling of large public enterprises in transitional economies, which can be accompanied by measures to promote the private sector and foster business opportunities, including for small and micro- enterprises. Developing a new regulatory framework or adapting an

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existing one to the changed context may include labour law reforms and other policies aimed at improving working conditions and employment opportunities.

The extent to which these processes are participatory depends on the capacity of different actors (for example workers' organizations) and the willingness of governments to include them in these processes. Governments often involve external actors to lend support to the institutions leading the reform processes, as a part of broadening support to reconstruction and recovery.

Regardless of the opportunities emerging from the processes described above, women's specific needs are often ignored due to their under-representation among decision-makers, and the underestimation of their productive and conceptual capacity. The new policies, labour and property regulations can reinforce women's discrimination with respect to equal opportunities, promotion, remuneration and social provisions. For example, property rights are particularly important for many women, as their house is often also their workplace. However, women's access to property is determined through male relations and regulated by 'male' institutions that often restrict single women or female-heads of households from full ownership rights and, in many cases, from means for production.

The issues and strategies related to women's participation in organizations and institutions involved in labour market regulation are described in Module 2, on "Organizational and Negotiating Power".

It is important to note that post-crisis recovery, being a period of intensive policy and legislation changes, offers a unique window of opportunity to correct structural imbalances in gender roles.

## **B.2 Social safety nets, social security and protection**

Social safety nets, both short- and medium-term, become critical in crisis and post-crisis periods due to the increased number of vulnerable individuals and households. Introducing new policies and mechanisms, or reforming existing ones, becomes a usual practice in crisis-affected countries. It includes a wide range of measures; from the provision of health care, to social protection schemes, and unemployment insurance. These strategies are essential to enable women to cope with the effects of crises and to earn some income; either because they decrease the time women devote to reproductive activities or offer them new working opportunities.

However, the process of social reconstruction does not always prioritize policies that reflect women's specific needs, nor ensures their access to it.

Women's over-representation in the informal economy and in precarious forms of employment restrict their access to social protection. These issues are further dealt with in Module 7, on "Extending Social Protection".

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### **B.3 Other gender aspects in crisis response**

#### ***The role of women organizations***

Like other community-based organizations, women's groups often provide direct services and support during crises. Their contribution is noteworthy as they are more likely to understand local women's social and economic vulnerability than professional planners or outside relief workers. Also, women's groups play an important role in identifying and reaching the most vulnerable at the local level, so they may be included in crisis mitigation, relief, and recovery projects. Some have also a unique access to indigenous women or to undocumented women working underground. However, these groups are not always invited to participate in the social dialogue on post-crisis recovery and infrastructure development. Their capacities often remain unknown, due to lack of gender-awareness of vulnerability and capacity assessments.

The experience of the ILO shows that establishing partnerships with women's organizations has many positive effects. It creates new opportunities for social relief in crises; contributes to enhancing the effectiveness of crisis response and reconstruction; strengthens the capacity of women's groups; and ensures that societies emerging from crisis include women's empowerment.

Ensuring women's participation can be achieved in two different ways. One is to implement women-specific projects that will guarantee benefits for women. The other is to adopt a community, inclusive approach involving both men and women. While the first approach can be appropriate in certain circumstances, particularly if advocated by women themselves, it can also reinforce the traditional gender roles and contribute to further gender segregation.

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*Box 4*

**ILO InFocus Programme on Crisis Response and Reconstruction**

ILO has a definite mandate and comparative advantage in crisis prevention, crisis response and reconstruction. It rests on its extensive research work and long-standing first-hand advisory and operational experience worldwide in poverty reduction and most socio-economic technical areas relevant to crisis contexts, including gender concerns. ILO has also proven capacity in the socio-economic reintegration of crisis-affected groups (through skills development, employment- and income-generation, social safety-net programmes), and the rebuilding of physical infrastructure and institutional capacity. Also crucial to crises is its unique tripartite structure and emphasis on social exchanges, essential to promote dialogue, reconciliation, and build consensus around socio-economic and other objectives.

Since 1999, ILO has a special In-Focus Programme on Crisis Response and Reconstruction (IFP/Crisis), dedicated to tackling the employment-related and other decent work challenges of crises. The Programme aims to build a coherent ILO framework and integrated capacity to respond to the diverse crises swiftly and effectively. It rests on four pillars:

- ❑ Development of a crisis knowledge-base, and tools such as guidelines and standard packages;
- ❑ Provision of technical assistance through direct interventions;
- ❑ Advocacy on the employment and other socio-economic repercussions and causes of crises, and the need to tackle them as an integral part of effective crisis resolution, prevention, reconstruction and sustainable peace building; and
- ❑ Capacity building, at different levels, within and outside the ILO, on handling the employment and other socio-economic challenges of crises response.

IFP/Crisis recognises gender equality as a central element in equitable, effective reconstruction and development, and for “universal and lasting peace”, a major tenet of ILO’s Constitution. It has a special work item on gender and crises, aimed at creating a “new environment” with less structural imbalances between men and women, primarily in the world of work but also in other spheres. The Programme’s projects provide positive examples of women participation in post-crisis reconstruction. Women represent 50% or more of participants in activities such as employment-intensive infrastructure building, vocational training and small-and micro-enterprise promotion. Many of them are taught non-traditional skills, such as construction and mechanical repairs, which have greater market value than traditional “female skills”, and help participate in reconstruction decision-making. This challenges the notion of gender-stereotyped occupations and roles, while improving the condition and position of women in post-crisis contexts.

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*Box 5*

**Providing women “male” skills  
to rebuild flooded communities: Chókwe (Mozambique)**

ILO rapid response to counter the disastrous effects of the 2000 Mozambican floods, in the Chókwe district, had women represent 87% of beneficiaries, and step out of their traditional occupations. This was linked to the fact that the two most affected sectors were agriculture and informal trade, where they were over-represented, and that a high proportion of men had migrated to work in the South African mines.

The response strategy aimed at meeting the basic needs of the local population, through a revival of local development, and participation of local actors. It focused on rehabilitating local market places, supporting small animal breeding, training in the use and maintenance of motor-pumps and the making and repairing of agricultural tools, and training on sustainable local development and elaboration of local projects. This gave women the opportunity to take on new activities and roles.

Source: ILO, *Crises Response Special Event* (ILO, Geneva, 2001).

*Box 6*

**Multi-skilling women  
in post-earthquake reconstruction: Gujarat (India)**

Following the 2001 major earthquake in the Indian district of Gujarat, ILO and the Self Employment Women’s Association (SEWA) jointly set up a pilot project for 10 villages, targeting mainly women artisans.

Its focus is training: in handicraft and other income-generating initiatives, in shelter reconstruction adopting labour-intensive techniques for earthquake-resistant construction, in routine maintenance and repair work. It includes a model for women’s participation in negotiations defining shelter and other community needs. The project emphasizes multiple skill-building, to provide occupational diversification as a major instrument of risk reduction. This empowering approach helps women take on multiple roles in society.

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*Box 7*

**ILO Quick Impact and Medium Term Work  
in Afghanistan**

Substantial work is needed to rehabilitate Afghanistan, requiring large numbers of skilled and unskilled workers as well as technicians and professionals. Providing women equality and opportunities in the emerging labour market is a particular concern.

ILO's extensive expertise in job placement, skills development and enterprise creation and development in crisis contexts makes it well placed to help rehabilitate Afghanistan and its employment sector. Gender equality being among ILO core Principles and Rights at Work, and ILO's experience in gender-sensitive employment and skills training in conflict-affected countries, will enable it to assist effectively women to find or develop employment opportunities.

By mid-2002, ILO has launched a Quick Impact Project (QIP); has four programme proposals approved by the local authority –on labour-intensive reconstruction, vocational training, skills development for returning refugees, women's labour market (re)integration-; and has a survey underway to feed those projects information on training, re-training and skills upgrading needs of different groups of men and women –educated/non-educated, skilled/unskilled, rural/urban. Thus, while one initiative targets women directly, in all gender is central. Below are some details:

- The QIP consists of three interlinked components to build up capacity in two ministries key to employment generation for men and women – Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, and Ministry of Women's Affairs – in three areas:

- Administration; particularly English language, computer, secretarial, administrative skills
- Identification of self-employment opportunities for uneducated women
- Managing employment and training opportunities through job centers

- The programme on women's labour market (re)integration aims at developing:

- Employment and income-generation opportunities for women's socio-economic empowerment
- Gender equality, social justice and Decent work principles in post-conflict reconstruction
- Capacity in the Ministries of Women's Affairs, and Labour and Social Affairs to ensure the observance of women's rights in the world of work.

### **C. Guide for action**

Employment promotion to improve the material welfare of the diverse crisis-affected groups is critical for the long-term social healing and socio-economic reintegration of these groups, as well as to facilitate the reconstruction and economic recovery of their communities and states. Generating jobs and income for crisis-affected people also affords crisis response agencies an unparalleled opportunity to challenge gender barriers. Integrating gender analysis into the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of post-crisis employment projects is essential to ensure women and men equal opportunities for decent work. It is a challenging task; and one critical for social justice, equity, sustainable development and peace.

Below are some key steps to be taken at various stages of crises.

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## **C.1 Mainstreaming gender at the preparedness and planning phase**

- Ensure the gender implications of crises are fully considered and reflected in pre-crisis preparedness, planning and programming. The use of gender analysis, gender disaggregated statistics, and community-based participatory methodologies can help highlight the distinct impacts of crisis on women and men. They can also serve to point out past imbalances and disparities that should be corrected. Planners themselves should be trained in gender issues and analysis, especially with reference to the crisis-affected environment.
- Adopt an inclusive community-based approach. Segregating women and men has often the effect of reinforcing assumptions of women's vulnerability and victimization, as well as creating gender conflict and competition.
- Adopt the capabilities and vulnerabilities matrix as a useful tool in identifying individual and community-based strengths and weaknesses. To be effective, community risk assessment and response planning need a thorough understanding of local hazards, capacities, capabilities and vulnerabilities. Regarding women's capabilities and capacities, planners need specific information about the employment and work patterns of women, their work skills and organizational networks. They need to identify and assess the resources of women workers' associations and cooperatives, and advocacy groups for crisis-vulnerable groups such as disabled women, older women, migrants, and women maintaining households. Planners should identify key groups of women whose local knowledge, community languages, social networks and insight into community history may be needed in vulnerability assessments. Regarding women's vulnerability, gender-specific data are needed to anticipate and address the economic impacts of crises on women and men. They include basic information about household structure, demographic trends, the division of labour, and local power structures; as well as about women's poverty and unemployment rates, their working conditions in major industries and occupations, their relative control over key economic assets, and the needs of vulnerable home-workers, women with disabilities, migrant workers, sole providers, and others.
- Sensitize and train staff in relation to gender issues. Crisis response programmes are more likely to be gender sensitive if the staff providing assistance to the crisis-affected communities is gender aware.

## **C.2 Ensuring gender-fairness in crisis interventions**

Crisis response and reconstruction must promote social justice, equity and sustainable development through the empowerment of men and women.

- Anticipate and monitor gender biases in the access of vulnerable groups to services. Women's effective access to relief is often restricted by differences in social power, social esteem and physical mobility. Gender-specific needs and traditional work patterns have to be recognized.

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- Build on the work of existing women’s groups. It is crucial to strengthen the work of women’s organizations and help bring their voices in the formulation of national policies. Partnership can extend to diverse groups: working women’s associations, environmental groups, grassroots advocacy organizations, female-dominated NGOs, and other community-based women’s groups.
  - Promote wide social dialogue; essential to restore confidence in institutions, facilitate dialogue between different factions in society (particularly in the case of armed conflict), reorient the social dynamics towards constructive purposes, and reinforce a sense of ownership and social inclusion of the different groups and communities affected by crises. It should involve a wide range of civil society bodies, including at the grassroots level.
  - Include women and their representatives in crisis-response social dialogue. This helps ensure reconstruction and recovery and reflect women’s strategic interests, and helps familiarize them and society with their full participation in decision-making.
  - Support the positive changes in gender roles that have occurred in the labour market. The “window of opportunity” for social change after crises can expand non-traditional work for women and men, with long-lasting positive consequences.
  - Involve women in labour-intensive programmes. Women can and should contribute to the reconstruction of community facilities and homes destroyed during a conflict or by natural disasters, as full participants in decision-making, planning and implementation. Flexible working hours, child-care facilities and similar services facilitate women’s participation.
  - Break down occupational segregation. Skills training and related programmes should be designed to ensure women have access to work opportunities at all levels, including supervisory and managerial roles, and enable women to access decent work outside their traditional activities. Non-traditional job training may be needed to enable women’s participation in immediate reconstruction and recovery.
  - Enlarge opportunities to include women in local economic revival, especially the increased number of them who are heads of households. Guidance in small and micro-enterprises and cooperative development, micro-finance and other business support services are important to help provide sustainable income generation for women. Investment is also needed in projects promoting human and social recovery, and increasing jobs for women in female-dominated education, health, social, and human service fields.
  - Increase the role and responsibilities of employers’ and workers’ organizations in crisis management. Flexitime and flexible-place options, counselling, on-site child-care, respite care for overburdened caregivers, and other services help crisis-impacted workers and their families recover.

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- Decrease women's burden of productive and reproductive work. Restoring community support structures, establishing special family support networks, and voluntary social protection schemes, can reduce significantly women's workload.

### **C.3 Policy Framework**

- Stimulate the adoption and implementation of gender-related ILO International Labour Standards in crisis-affected countries. Create an overall favourable and enabling framework along the lines suggested in particular by Convention 111 on Discrimination and Convention 100 on Equal Remuneration, and monitor their implementation.
- Advocate the importance of skills training and employment promotion for the reintegration of diverse crisis-affected groups, the reconstruction of societies and, in case of armed conflicts, the building of sustainable peace. Integrate women workers' rights and gender concerns in these processes as an essential element of their success.

### **C.4 Overall Concerns**

- There should be no trade-off between speed of action and gender considerations.
- Hold a vigilant gender-advocacy stance at all crisis stages, as gender awareness needs prompting.
- Avoid viewing men and women roles as adversarial, and present the advantages of women's empowerment to men, families and communities.

## **Conclusions**

This guide analyses the disastrous effects of crises on employment and poverty; as well as the capacity of crisis-affected people, men and women, to overcome their devastating effects and ensure return to decent life.

Regardless of their nature, crises always affect disproportionately the weakest and already marginalized groups, and contribute to the creation of new vulnerabilities. This module looks at vulnerability to crises as a result of different social factors that reduce access to or control over resources needed during and after the crises. It examines the specific impacts of different types of crisis such as natural disasters, armed conflicts, financial and economic downturns, and difficult social and political transitions, from a gender perspective.

Crises affect men and women differently because society ascribes different roles and responsibilities to them. Women tend to be more exposed to the adverse

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effects of crises due to the pre-crisis patterns of poverty, their secondary status in the labour market, over-representation in the informal-economy, lesser access to productive assets and information, and extensive domestic responsibilities; which make them economically vulnerable long before a crisis strikes.

Different approaches to crisis response and post-crisis recovery are reviewed; including employment-intensive infrastructure rehabilitation and construction, income-generating projects such as micro-credit facilities, skills training, rebuilding of social safety nets and creating or reforming policies and mechanisms to regulate the social protection sector.

The last chapter formulates suggestions for action, based on ILO experience. It stresses that post-crisis period offers a window of opportunity for promoting social justice, redressing inequalities and reducing vulnerabilities. Specific recommendations are made to integrate gender analysis into the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of post-crisis employment projects, which is essential to ensure women and men equal opportunities for decent work. Suggestions are also made to promote social justice, equity, sustainable development and the empowerment of men and women in crisis response and reconstruction. Generating jobs and income for crisis-affected people creates opportunities for crisis-response agencies to challenge gender barriers, and thereby mobilize all available energies and skills for effective socio-economic reconstruction, economic recovery and peaceful, sustainable development of communities and states. Specific reference is made to the role of international human rights mechanisms and international labour standards.

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<sup>1</sup> References marked with an asteric can be found on the ILO InFocus Programme on Crisis Response and Reconstruction Website, <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/recon/crisis/publ/index.htm>

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