

Gender in crisis response

CRISES

- *Affect differently men and women*
- *Change gender roles*
- *Offer a window of opportunity to question gender stereotypes*

THE CHALLENGE

Gender is a complex yet key dimension in effective crisis resolution, recovery and development.

Crises affect men and women, boys and girls differently, given the different roles society ascribes them. The gendered division of labour in households and the economy makes most women less able to control resources and processes relevant to tackle crises, than most men. Also, men and women experience and respond to crises in different ways.

Women face multiple disadvantages in crises.

For instance, in economic downturns they lose their jobs faster and in greater numbers, their small businesses are hard hit and their household entitlements decline. In natural disasters, women lacking land rights or farming small plots are most vulnerable and may be forced off the land entirely. Since land and labour arrangements are usually negotiated through men, women may lose access to both without a man representing them, as may happen after wars. In all crises women's working conditions plummet. Their workload increases tremendously due to damaged infrastructure, housing and workplaces; the need to compensate for declining family income and social services; and to care for orphaned children, the elderly and the disabled. This also limits their mobility and time for income-generation. Demographic patterns and household structure change, particularly after conflicts, and women often become the sole providers and caregivers of the household. Education declines most for girls, due to tighter family budgets and increased demands on their time. Specially in socio-political transitions, women's opportunities are further diminished by their declining political participation and the re-emergence of traditional patriarchal attitudes. Women are also prey to violence; linked to the deterioration of law and order, men's stress that translates into sexual and other abuses, and mass rape being used as war weapon. Crisis-related hardships combine and compound old disadvantages.



Yet, **women are also engines of recovery.** They display resilience and resourcefulness in extreme conditions, self-reliance and willingness for proactive community work. They are typically society's last safety net.

Crises are a window of opportunity to break down gender barriers



ILO/J. Maillet

Pre-crisis unequal gender roles often change in crises, as women and men can step out of their socially ascribed roles in their coping strategies. Engaging in construction, mechanical and other “male” occupations, creating small enterprises, contributing to reconstruction discussions, acquiring more education while externally displaced, and having no traditional “male” and “female” roles in the absence of men, empower women in terms of economic independence, ability as family providers, decision-making and social position. Positive changes in gender roles need and deserve support. Women need sufficient and truly empowering recovery assistance.

Training provided to them should not revert to their traditional functions – sewing, cooking, etc. – but reflect opportunities in the emerging labour market and build on the changes that have occurred. Support should also target the increasing number of women working at home or in the informal economy in times of crises, often invisible. Women's presence is needed in peace negotiations, planning and implementation of reconstruction and other recovery processes, decision-making structures and transitional governments. It helps develop a

women-enabling economic, labour market and social and legal environment. Longer-term recovery should capitalize on those changes and avoid returning to pre-crisis or worse patterns so as to allow both women's and men's advancement, and reduce vulnerability to crises of both.

Negative side-effects of new gender roles need containing. In some instances, women's assumption of male activities in agriculture resulted in increased domestic violence and divorce when their husbands returned from war.

ILO RESPONSE

ILO's InFocus Programme on Crisis Response and Reconstruction (IFP/CRISIS) is working on women's empowerment and gender equality as necessary elements of crisis prevention, resolution, reconstruction and recovery:

- ▶▶ Enriching the knowledge base on gender and crises, via research and capitalization of experience.
- ▶▶ Strengthening the capacity of disaster-response bodies, ILO constituents – governments, employers and workers – and community groups, to address the gender dimension of crises, via training, guidelines for practice and technical cooperation programmes.
- ▶▶ Widely advocating a gender-sensitive paradigm shift in crisis intervention, among ILO constituents, partner organizations, donors, the media and the general public.
- ▶▶ Sensitize and train crisis practitioners on the gender dimensions of crises. Stress the importance of women workers' rights and gender concerns in the reconstruction of societies, and building of sustainable peace and economic development.
- ▶▶ Hold a vigilant advocacy stance at all crisis stages, as gender awareness needs prompting.
- ▶▶ Fully grasp gender implications of crises, and the complexity of their dynamics (through gender analysis, disaggregated data, the capabilities and vulnerability matrix and community-based participatory methodologies), and reflect them in planning and programming.
- ▶▶ Monitor gender bias in access to services by men and women (gender-specific needs and traditional work patterns need to be recognized).
- ▶▶ Avoid viewing men's and women's roles in crises as adversarial, and present the advantages of women's empowerment to men, families and communities.
- ▶▶ Use inclusive community-based approaches, as segregating women and men in crisis response can reinforce perceptions of women's vulnerability and create gender conflict and competition.
- ▶▶ Take advantage of and assist positive gender role changes in crises and their long-term sustainability.
- ▶▶ Break down occupational segregation and give women job opportunities in all fields, including construction and other “male” jobs, independent work, etc. (through relevant technical and management training, credit schemes, etc.) and at all levels, especially supervision and management.

KEY LESSONS FROM ILO WORK

- ▶▶ Avoid trade-off between speed of action and gender considerations.



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“We want work. Give us work!”

Asks a woman survivor in earthquake-stricken Gujarat



“Multiskilling” women in post-earthquake reconstruction, Gujarat (India)

Following the 2001 major earthquake, ILO and the Self-Employment Women Association (SEWA) jointly set up a pilot project for 10 villages, mainly targeting women artisans. Its focus is training in handicraft and other income-generating initiatives, in shelter reconstruction adopting labour-intensive techniques for earthquake-resistant construction, and 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.



Providing women with “male” skills to rebuild flooded communities, Chokwe (Mozambique)

A recent ILO pilot project to counter the disastrous effects of the Mozambican floods in 2000 had women representing 87 per cent of beneficiaries. It focused on rehabilitating local market places, support to 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.



- ▶ Beware of and limit negative survival strategies or side-effects.
- ▶ Lighten women’s burden of productive and reproductive work – restoring community support structures, establishing special family support networks, and voluntary social protection schemes.
- ▶ Strengthen and build on the work of existing women’s groups (working women’s associations, environmental groups, grass-root advocacy organizations, female-dominated NGOs, etc.).
- ▶ Include women and men equally in reconstruction planning, implementing and monitoring bodies and discussions, to ensure that their strategic interests are represented and familiarize them and society with their full participation in decision-making.



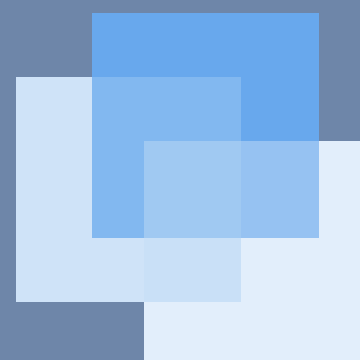
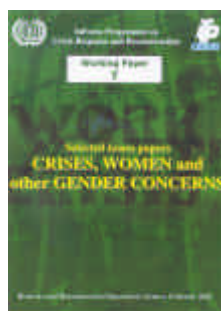
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For further information

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