



# GENDER-RESPONSIVENESS AND DISABILITY-INCLUSION IN DISASTER RISK REDUCTION IN ASIA

Photo: UN Women/Tran Van Tuy

## KEY MESSAGES

- Inclusive and transformative disaster risk reduction (DRR) requires a sound understanding of how socioeconomic characteristics intersect with and shape people's unique vulnerability to disasters. Current approaches to inclusive DRR tend to overlook the complexity of power dynamics among different groups in society and categorize social groups as if they are homogenous.
- Of the 14 countries in Asia that were assessed for this study (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Japan, Maldives, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Viet Nam), only six (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Maldives, Mongolia, Nepal, and Sri Lanka) are collecting and using sex-, age- and disability-disaggregated data (SADDD) to monitor the implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. Operational agencies need SADDD to plan targeted assistance and programming, and it should also be complemented by qualitative data to understand the root causes of vulnerability and design transformative actions to ensure the meaningful participation of marginalized groups.
- Continuous and sustainable efforts and investments are required to ensure inclusive DRR. This can be achieved through gender-responsive budgeting and by mainstreaming gender equality and social inclusion in all phases of policy development and programme implementation. Cooperation and collaboration between all actors involved in DRR are crucial to achieve inclusive results. To avoid duplication of efforts and enable more holistic and transformative approaches, national authorities can facilitate a multi-stakeholder approach, while at the same time bolstering resources for national machineries for gender equality, statistical agencies and disaster finance and risk management institutions, as well as non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations and grassroots organizations that play a crucial role in advocating for gender equality and social inclusion.



## INTRODUCTION

Compared to other regions, Asia is one of the most exposed to natural hazards, which leads to profound impacts on agriculture, fisheries, tourism and various industries. These impacts particularly affect vulnerable people's livelihoods, with disproportionate consequences on women, children and youth, and people with disabilities. The impacts of climate change have accelerated the frequency and intensity of disasters, which pose further threats to the lives, assets and livelihoods of people in Asia.

Countries in Asia have taken proactive approaches to better understand and manage climate change-related disasters and bolster their disaster risk reduction (DRR) measures, especially at the subnational and local levels. Furthermore, the region's countries have adopted the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015–2030) and other regional frameworks and mechanisms such as the Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction, the Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response and the Ulaanbaatar<sup>1</sup> Declaration.

In disaster events, the most vulnerable populations are those facing social and political marginalization based on their gender, (dis)ability, age or other characteristics, which are often overlooked in DRR and affect their capacity to recover from disasters. Therefore, the need to prioritize considerations for gender equality and social inclusion have been expressed through DRR frameworks and have been particularly highlighted in the Hanoi Recommendation for Action on Gender and Disaster Risk Reduction (2016).

## UNDERSTANDING GAPS IN POLICY COMMITMENTS AND IMPLEMENTATION

As 2020 marks the five-year anniversary of the adoption of the Sendai Framework, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) commissioned the Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI) Asia Centre, to conduct a review on the status of gender-responsive and disability-inclusive commitments and

### Asian countries included in the study



1 The Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) concerns members of ASEAN (Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam).

progresses in the Asia-Pacific region. The study team assessed national DRR strategies and action plans of 14 countries in Asia (see map) to see how international commitments and recommendations for gender equality and social inclusion were integrated into their approaches to DRR. Following this, the team collected case studies from key stakeholders in Mongolia, the Philippines and Viet Nam in order to gain insights and better understand the gaps between policy commitments and their implementation on the ground. The findings of these case studies highlight some of the main enablers and barriers to the inclusion of gender and disability issues in DRR strategies, and they contributed to the recommendations of the study that can help achieve more inclusive DRR in the region.

## KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Insufficient capacities to mainstream gender equality and social inclusion in DRR, due to a lack of understanding of the root causes of vulnerability

Cultural beliefs and social practices are often the cause of discrimination and marginalization of certain social groups, including women; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and other (LGBTQ+) people; people with disabilities; and indigenous people among others. which also exclude them from DRR planning and activities. International and regional frameworks on DRR tend to promote inclusive policies and programmes through the collection and use of sex-, age- and disability-disaggregated data (SADDD), however, only six of the Asian countries reviewed in this study adopted this approach.<sup>2</sup> While SADDD are crucial to inform policymaking and planning, they are insufficient in and of themselves to generate transformative action. For instance, the study found that people with disabilities are commonly considered a homogenous group in national DRR plans, even though the multiple forms of disability entail different needs. Consequently, policies

and programmes which do not recognize and address underlying causes of vulnerability are less likely to enable inclusive DRR. The limited understanding of individuals and their intersecting vulnerabilities may be caused by a lack of qualitative analysis, such as gender analysis that examines social dynamics and the root causes of vulnerabilities that result in unequal distributions of risk. Among the 14 countries assessed in this study, only Sri Lanka has committed to carrying out gender analysis. Such approaches are often lacking because they must be carried out by trained staff with gender expertise, and agencies rarely allocate enough resources for training their staff on gender issues, including carrying out gender and social analysis to inform their programmes.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Improve understanding on the root causes of disaster risk and the unequal distribution of impacts and vulnerability, through SADDD and improved capacities for qualitative analyses.** Such approaches can help identify the most at-risk groups and design targeted actions to fit their specific needs to enable transformative change. One of the best practices in using mixed-methods for data collection and analyses can be found in Sri Lanka, where SADDD are recorded in the national database on disaster loss and damages and support the development of community vulnerability profiles through the Disaster Risk Information Platform. A sound understanding of underlying power dynamics can help policymakers to design targeted interventions allowing social change. For example, a project conducted by the Vietnam Women's Union provided targeted capacity-building and trainings that contested gender stereotypes in disaster management, enabling women to change their self-perception from victims to agents of change.
- **Address knowledge gaps on specific vulnerabilities experienced by different social groups.** This entails addressing knowledge gaps on gender-based violence in disasters, following the initiative of Nepal

2 The six countries are Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Maldives, Mongolia, Nepal and Sri Lanka

where the Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizen is encouraging the promotion of safe shelters and female-friendly counselling while also distributing post-rape treatment kits to survivors. Addressing knowledge gaps on disability in disaster contexts is also crucial, and can be improved by disaggregating data by types of disabilities (physical, mental, learning etc.), following the example of Mongolia which recently integrated this type of disaggregation to their templates for disaster data collection.

- **Apply an intersectional lens while implementing the Sendai Framework**, which entails avoiding categorizing social groups by single characteristics and recognizing how socioeconomic identities such as gender, wealth, sexual orientation, age, education, caste, ethnicity, disability and other identities and conditions produce inequalities and exclusions in DRR. This can be achieved by addressing the knowledge gaps mentioned above which will help identify entry points to tackle intersecting vulnerabilities through targeted DRR interventions.

## LACK OF STABLE FUNDING FOR INCLUSIVE DRR.

While national government are responsible for allocating sufficient budgets to national disaster management offices, many disaster risk management agencies across countries are underfunded and therefore have fewer resources and less capacity to push forward issues related to gender equality and social inclusion. Because of this, many programmes become reliant on external funding from sources such as international organizations or international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to address gender equality and social inclusion in DRR. Yet, these funds can be unstable and/or lacking, causing such efforts to end up in different project cycles instead of being continuous and holistic. The study found that of the 14 assessed countries, only six are proactively pursuing gender mainstreaming and building the required capacities within governance



Photo: UN Women / Vidura-Jang Bahadur

bodies.<sup>3</sup> Although the study found many commitments to gender equality and social inclusion, the lack of available monitoring documents points to a critical gap: the lack of a centralized monitoring and evaluation system to track progress and ensure accountability. Without dedicated institutions responsible for inclusive DRR and without appropriate tools to track progress, commitments might not be implemented as there are no mechanism to hold duty-bearers accountable.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Secure resources for inclusive DRR through gender-responsive budgeting and mainstream gender equality and social inclusion through dedicated institutions.** This recommendation is inspired by good practices in the Philippines: each government agency allocates at least 5 per cent of their annual budget for gender mainstreaming in their area of work, including the Office of Civil Defense, which is the coordinating agency

<sup>3</sup> The six countries are Bangladesh, India, Japan, Mongolia, Nepal and the Philippines.

for DRR at the national and local levels. This budget supports the appointment of a gender focal points and provides resources for the integration of gender considerations in operational guidelines and procedures, and for trainings to mainstream gender in DRR. As a stable source of funding, the budget also allows long-term planning and investments in building the capacities of relevant staff to understand the root causes of vulnerability to disasters and develop competencies for more inclusive DRR. In parallel, the Philippine Commission on Women also contributes to gender mainstreaming in key national activities, and the Commission is consulted in DRR committees and it is involved in trainings exercises and capacity-building activities.

- **Set up a national monitoring and evaluation mechanism to ensure the implementation of inclusive DRR.** The critical lack of monitoring and evaluation documents makes it difficult to track the implementation of promising commitments to inclusive DRR and evaluate their progress. While some strategies and action plans were developed with the support of international organizations and NGOs that have their own monitoring and evaluation systems as part of their programmes, governments need to mainstream and adequately resource their own monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for strategies they developed solely.

## LACK OF COORDINATION BETWEEN STAKEHOLDERS.

DRR involves a variety of actors, from government agencies to local NGOs, civil society organizations (CSOs) and grassroots organizations, often with the help of international organizations. Coordination between these actors has been identified as one of the main challenges to inclusive DRR, as each actor has its own agenda determined by either political aims, donor requirements or local interests. Their agendas are implemented using their own protocols and monitoring mechanisms. This can result in overlapping and duplicated

efforts that waste resources and may cause complex realities to be overlooked by actors working in silos instead of considering holistic approaches based on collaboration. This has been identified as one of the main causes when countries have not consistently reported progress to the Sendai Framework Monitor (SFM): disaster data are often available but scattered among different agencies and collected using different methodologies that cannot be easily unified and centralized.

While centralizing coordination can be the key to ensure more efficient DRR, localization is also crucial to ensure policies and programmes are relevant to local contexts and address the needs of all. This requires meaningful participation from at-risk communities, especially the most marginalized people who have the greatest vulnerability to disasters. Of the 14 assessed countries, the study found that 11 recognized the need to involve women in DRR formulation through consultation and participation,<sup>4</sup> and seven countries are working towards including people with disabilities in these processes.<sup>5</sup> However, the absence of concrete action plans can result in superficial interventions, such as encouraging parity in representation, instead of interventions that build the capacities of women and people with disabilities to enable them to contribute meaningfully to DRR.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Streamline SADD collection through unified and centralized monitoring platforms and enhance capacities for applying an inclusive lens in data analysis.** The review of existing monitoring platforms showed that although most countries do not consistently report SADD onto the SFM, there are often multiple databases scattered between different organizations and government

4 The 11 countries are Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Japan, Maldives, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Philippines, Sri Lanka and Viet Nam.

5 The seven countries are Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal and the Philippines.

departments. As suggested by several stakeholders consulted for this study, a unified and centralized framework for data collection is crucial to support evidence-based policies and programmes, and to evaluate progress towards gender equality and social inclusion in DRR. Appointing a focal point to ensure consistent methodologies for data collection and analysis is also a key enabler: in Mongolia, disaster statistics methodology and official templates were developed and approved by both the National Statistics Office and National Emergency Management Agency. A unified and centralized framework for data collection would enable countries to have accurate databases. When combined with enhanced capacities for applying an inclusive lens in data analysis, policymakers would be able to use the data to better plan for gender and social inclusion in DRR activities.

- **Institutionalize multi-stakeholder cooperation at all levels.** This collaboration can be facilitated by national DRR authorities, as observed in Viet Nam, where seats are reserved for DRR practitioners in meetings at the central level but also at the local level, seeking their inputs to ensure a multidisciplinary approach that fits the needs of the population, including the most marginalized. By encouraging regular collaboration between stakeholders, bridges can be built, for example between NGOs and CSOs – key actors with on-the-ground knowledge – and the public and private sector – which often lag behind when it comes to conducting holistic gender and social analysis.
- **Bolster resources for NGOs, CSOs and grassroots organizations engaged in gender equality work and disability rights.** The advocacy work led by CSOs in the Philippines contributed to put gender equality and social inclusion on the political agenda and to hold duty-bearers accountable for more inclusive policies. While disability-inclusion remains a critical gap in DRR strategies in Asia, cross-region exchanges with countries in the Pacific could help to close this gap. Indeed, the Pacific Disability Forum plays a big role in

correcting misconceptions around people with disabilities in the region, and it helps to build bridges between stakeholders to facilitate cross-sectoral dialogues and identify data gaps.

- **Ensure meaningful participation of various groups, including promoting the agency of women and people with disabilities.** Measures for diversifying participation need to go beyond procedural requirements or counting the number of target participants. An important first step towards promoting the meaningful participation of diverse groups that are usually left out of DRR planning and activities is to have a thorough understanding of their complex needs and experiences. This helps to identify entry-points to create enabling environments for the meaningful participation of women, people with disabilities and other groups. Building the confidence of the most at-risk groups will help them to claim their rights and leverage their leadership capacities for further advocacy for inclusive DRR, while avoiding tokenism. For example, in the Philippines the Women in Emergency Network is led by women to promote collaboration between different DRR stakeholders on gender-responsive resilience-building to enhance women's capacities for leadership and advocacy at various levels.

**WOMEN'S RESILIENCE TO DISASTERS IS A PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN:**



**EMPOWER: WOMEN FOR CLIMATE-RESILIENT SOCIETIES IS A PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN:**



**FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THESE PROGRAMMES, PLEASE CONTACT:**

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