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After the deluge: gender and early recovery housing in Sindh, Pakistan

Shaheen Ashraf Shah

Department of Sociology
University of Warwick
United Kingdom

E-mail: shani.ashraf9@gmail.com

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**Policy Development and Evaluation Service
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
P.O. Box 2500, 1211 Geneva 2
Switzerland**

**E-mail: hqpd00@unhcr.org
Web Site: www.unhcr.org**

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Introduction

Experience shows that understanding gender dynamics in disaster-struck communities is a central aspect of effective relief, reconstruction and rehabilitation. In a disaster, women, girls and vulnerable groups potentially experience a higher risk of being excluded from mainstream developmental processes and practices. It is argued that following ‘gender approaches can assist in the understanding and profiling of vulnerable groups, in channelling resources to those most in need, and in the mobilization of the capacities of a significant proportion of the population that is often under-estimated’ (Graham, 2001).

During 2010 and 2011, Pakistan experienced a series of catastrophic floods throughout the region, compounding existing difficulties and causing conditions to go from bad to worse. Sindh was the worst affected province, where people that were already recovering from the 2010 mega-floods, chronic poverty and vulnerability, were further marginalised as a result of the 2011 floods. Women, the elderly, minority groups, differently abled people and children were among those hit hardest.

This study examines and evaluates the gender aspects of the early recovery housing/one- two room shelters provided by humanitarian organizations to replace the destroyed houses of the affected population in two districts (Dadu and Thatta) of Sindh Province. It draws examples from the field in order to understand the experiences of the vulnerable, especially women, in undergoing gendered housing programs and projects. In doing so, this study empirically verifies to what extent gender needs and concerns are taken into account in early recovery shelters by following Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC)¹ gender guidelines as the minimum response benchmark.

The shelter projects/programs were selected for gender analysis, because, in most communities, women bear the primary responsibility for household chores, and therefore, the design of the sites and shelters must reflect women’s needs and should be undertaken with them. Results show that neglecting gender aspects can be problematic, if systematic participatory assessment and analyses are not undertaken with all those involved.

The assessments and evaluations followed a deductive analysis based on a mixed methods approach for data collection, such as a desk review of secondary literature, in-depth qualitative individual and group interviews, direct observation during field visits, as well as the outcomes of relief and recovery responses. This paper is structured as follows: it first discusses flood contexts and women in disasters in Pakistan. Next, a literature review is provided regarding gender and disaster, with a special focus on engendering humanitarian response, women and housing.

The paper then goes on to explain the research methodology, detailing profiles of the communities and organizations under review. Before concluding, a thorough gender analysis is provided explaining major findings of the study. Finally, this paper concludes by describing its conclusions and recommendations in the light of the study findings.

¹IASC is the primary mechanism for inter-agency coordination of humanitarian assistance. It is a unique forum involving the key UN and non-UN humanitarian partners.

Mega-floods in Pakistan

The 2010 flood in Pakistan was huge, mega disaster, which began in late July, following heavy monsoon rains which had continued for weeks. Floods swept through most regions (KPK, Punjab and Sindh), devastating a large part of the country. Some 20,202,327 individuals, approximately 10 per cent of the country's population were affected. Overall, the economic damage caused by this disaster has been estimated at some 10.1 billion USD, or 5.8 per cent of GDP².

However, Sindh was the worst affected province. According to the Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA), within Sindh, a total number of 7,277 villages were affected as a result of the floodwater, leaving over 7 million people displaced. A total of 186 people died, 909 injured in the flood devastation. Sindh Province, therefore, experienced a broader and longer period of displacement and a protracted emergency situation (RTE, 2011).

Whilst people were recovering from the 2010 floods, with Sindh province itself yet to complete almost 40 per cent of the repair work (Memon, N. 2011), the next floods hit even harder, flooding 22 out of 24 of Sindh's districts, adding over 8 million more people to the list of those affected, damaging 1.48 million houses, 2.285 million acres of agricultural land and 116,557 cattle. The 2011 floods multiplied the existing problems and challenges with which the humanitarian community were already dealing. Although forecasts regarding the 2011 floods primarily caused by rains had already been issued by the experts, little was done in advance to mitigate such a precarious emergency situation.

During the 2010 floods, it was observed that the initial flood emergency response plan's life-saving activities were more swiftly activated and better funded, although funding for other non-life-saving and early recovery activities was much lower than required. By February 2011, the amount of foreign assistance pledged for the Pakistan flood response reached a record high of 3 billion USD.

To date, the Pakistan Flood Relief and Early Recovery Response Plan (PFRERRP) have received 1.1 billion USD in contributions, corresponding to 56 per cent of the funds requested. In total, 79 donors have contributed to the humanitarian response through both in-kind and in-cash contributions. Enormous amounts of funding and donations in kind for humanitarian relief came from outside the UN appeal, through private foundations, charities, religious and community groups, and the Army (RTE, 2011).

It was widely realised soon after the 2011 floods that the response for funding was not as swift or as fast as it had been in response to the floods of the previous year; the flood response of 2011 could not adequately prevent major food crises and the outbreak of disease in its early response.

Aid agencies say millions are still in dire need of assistance, and there have been renewed warnings of malnutrition in the worst-hit province of Sindh. The UN's appeal for \$356 million has only reached \$134.8 million (37. cent per cent) so far³. UN Agencies have warned that the 2011 flash floods appeal remains distressingly under-funded with a 63 per

²According to the Pakistan Floods Preliminary Damage and Needs Assessment 2010, ADB/WB, November 2010 direct damage caused by the floods is estimated to PKR 552 billion (US\$ 6.5 billion) while indirect losses amount to PKR 303 billion (US\$ 3.6 billion)

³See EAD <http://www.ead.gov.pk/>

cent shortfall: if more funding is not received, relief supplies will run out within weeks, preventing UN agencies from providing life-saving clean water, sanitation, food, shelter and healthcare. A recently completed joint UN-Government Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment (MSNA, Nov 2011) reveals that 4.3 million people are food-insecure, with 2.2 million people severely food-insecure and 2.1 million people moderately food-insecure in the flood-affected areas of Sindh and Balochistan.

Nevertheless, these mega disasters have exposed several issues associated with the country's inability to cope with such calamities and the urgent need for an integrated disaster management system. 'A careful review of the flood disaster reveals that the disaster was not merely a natural calamity, part of the credit also goes to bad engineering, poor flood-management strategies and virtually collapsed institutional systems' (Memon, N. 2011).

Several other issues were also highlighted: lack of sufficient resources; administrative and institutional failure; corruption; criminal negligence; political interference; lack of trained human resources; no principled approach; and infrastructure destruction, all of which rendered the flood response ineffective and inefficient. At these times of crisis, the most important issue was the perceived lack of credibility and accountability associated with Pakistani government structures which is why donors mostly opted to contribute to the UN response plan rather than the government of Pakistan's response fund.

Gender in floods

There are a variety of international norms and standards that lay the foundation for gender equality in a humanitarian response. The UN Charter reaffirms a faith in fundamental human rights. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW 1979) is considered an international bill of rights for women. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BFPA, 1995) provides a blueprint for gender equality. Others include the Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and armed conflicts, the Economic and Social Council decision of 1997 (E/1997/66) and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The international organizations, networks, researchers, gender task forces and experts serving globally for the promotion of gender in disasters have further developed operational and practical guidance material on how to identify and address the differing needs and situations of women, girls, boys and men; in other words, being sensitive to gender issues in humanitarian crises. (See also Sphere Handbook – 2004; Hyogo Framework, UNISDR – 2008; UN ISDR – 2009a and b; UN ISDR – 2004; ITDG - Jan, 2004; IASC - 2007).

The global literature on gender and disaster includes various well-documented experiences made within several contexts highlighting women's victimisation in emergencies, as well as their productive role in building communities including various gender strategies and coping mechanisms adapted to the disaster response (Akcar, 2001; Bari, 1998; Morrow & Phillips, 1999; Enarson, 1999). Very often an understanding of vulnerability and the development of strategies for overcoming it can be advanced through gender analysis.

Pakistan's National Disaster and Management Authority (NDMA) has also developed guidelines on mainstreaming Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), Gender and Environment with the objective that these mainstream key elements are to provide disaster managers with the initial tools as to how the infrastructure and social vulnerability can be taken care of during

the disaster response. During the floods in Pakistan, Gender Task Forces (GTFs) were setup at various levels and led by UN Agencies, which involved stakeholders and provided technical support on gender issues as well as raising gender concerns in different forums. GTFs were mandated to work with clusters in enhancing a gender-sensitive humanitarian response according to the standard guidelines. Various UN clusters formed during the flood response in Pakistan have their own checklists, strategies and guiding principles for making the response more gender-friendly.

A rigorous exercise of gender markers⁴ was also carried out by UN Agencies in relation to gender scores applied to the projects in Pakistan's Flood Emergency Response Fund (PFERP), so that all projects in an appeal routinely ensure that all segments of the affected population have equal access, protection and assistance and that targeted support to advance gender equality is based on a gender analysis.

The preliminary gender assessments conducted by UN Women Pakistan reveals several gender concerns and stories of sudden inundation, shock and chaos (UN Women, 2010). The UN Women Report indicates that the majority of women and girls had no independent access to the tools used for communicating flood warnings, such as loudspeakers in mosques, mobiles and FM Radio.

The Report further highlights that after arriving in flood camps especially, women reported that there were neither sufficient arrangements for washing nor hygiene services for menstruating girls and women. They were compelled to use and reuse rags as sanitary towels. These camps did not have formal security mechanisms and structures in place, except where people had organised their own watch groups.

It is important to highlight that 66 per cent of the respondents of the survey conducted by Protection Cluster in flood camps in Southern Sindh (SS) reported "no safe place or privacy" as the most important concern women face in the community. Women also reported cases of sexual harassment in camps where there were mixed groups of tribes, families and villages. Many women said they could not sleep at night and those who traditionally maintain purdah felt vulnerable and threatened by the presence of men who are strangers.

Malnutrition rates in Sindh are also among the highest in the country, worsened by the floods according to recent surveys published in January 2011 by UNICEF. With an estimated 90,000 under-fives malnourished, the survey report showed an acute malnutrition (GAM) rate of 21.2 percent in children aged six months to five years in southern Sindh.

The media reported several incidents of the aid and relief trucks being looted by people desperate for assistance. Women were reluctant to even try to collect food, as they needed to physically jostle and compete with men. It was apparent, during early response and recovery, vulnerable and disadvantaged groups such as women, widows, children who were the head of their household, minority groups, the elderly community and those with special needs suffered the most in this gendered situation and complained of lack of assistance, discrimination and unequal access to resources (UNHCR , 2010). However, vulnerability varies greatly from one community to another, and from one individual to another, depending

⁴The IASC Gender Marker is a tool that codes, on a 0-2 scale, whether or not a humanitarian project is designed well enough to ensure that women/girls and men/boys will benefit equally from it or that it will advance gender equality in another way. Gender code 0 means no visible potential to contribute to gender equality and project assigned code 2 means project's principle purpose is to advance gender equality

upon a wide range of socio-economic factors including age, material welfare, level of education, politics, ethnicity, and so on (Rivers 1982).

In these flood crises, what was more pertinent to women in Sindh was that the floods mainly affected the agrarian community in rural areas, where more than 70 per cent of the active female labour force is engaged in agricultural activities. Sindh province suffered the highest damage to Kharif crops with 60 per cent of the cotton crop, 64 per cent of the sugarcane cultivated and 100 per cent of the rice crop estimated to have been damaged by the floods.

Women in rural areas affected by the floods lost all hope for one of their major income-generating activities as the cotton crop was destroyed. Cotton picking is predominantly women's work that provides a direct income to poor women in rural areas: the floods struck when their work was about to begin. Most importantly, dewatering of the affected areas has taken much longer, with the authorities displaying little interest in carrying out the work. The hope for the next crop also declined due to standing water, whilst other means for women to generate a livelihood and income such as raising livestock, family-owned crops, sewing and crafts were also badly impacted, thereby affecting women's lives and their source of a livelihood in the longer term.

The vast and massive destruction, lack of sufficient support in camps, chronic vulnerability, extreme malnutrition, insecurity, health hazards and pressure from local authorities for the return to affected areas exerted great pressure on communities for an urgent return to their villages. The processes of return and recovery were even more painful. Numerous obstacles were often standing in the way of affected people; several cases of looting, fraud and an increase in the price of basic items were reported, all of which multiplied human suffering.

Women and housing

The right to housing matters for everyone and is internationally recognised; for instance the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) Article 25 and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) Article 11 both guarantee the right of everyone to a standard of living which will adequately ensure health and well-being, including food, clothing, housing, medical care and necessary social services. This right also implies the continuous improvement of living conditions.

It is argued that 'the right to housing should not be interpreted in a narrow or restrictive sense which equates it with, for example, the shelter provided by merely having a roof over one's head or views shelter exclusively as a commodity. Rather it should be seen as the right to live somewhere in security, peace and dignity' (United Nations, Dec 2010). But constructing a house of one's own is a difficult task in the aftermath of disasters especially when communities have already lost social relationships, networks, assets and livelihoods built up over many years (Enarson, 1999).

Nevertheless, house has a particular importance for women especially in segregated societies like rural Sindh, where women's lives are more housebound and they spend a significant amount of time indoors within the boundaries of their homes or villages, and, in some cases, for the duration of their whole life. Research has shown 'how differently women and men use spaces as well as time (Rose 1993), how women work and earn inside homes (Tinker 1990; Boris and Prugl 1996) and how women have organize to secure houses in toxic- threatened

environment (Rodda 1994, cited in Enarson, 1999)’. Therefore, housing too must effectively and efficiently reflect the needs of all.

The responsiveness of the disaster response to all segments of society also raises the status of vulnerable and contributes in the empowerment of women. In the context of Pakistan, Bari (1998) shows how gender sensitive processes and tools have been applied in field by an NGO, systematically and consciously involving women in housing project at every stage of disaster response from planning to implementation to evaluation in order to empower women through women friendly disaster response.

With regard to early recovery housing reconstruction in disasters, it is suggested in IASC (2007) guidelines that local communities should be involved in decision-making regarding the location, design and infrastructure of housing and settlements to ensure that they are safe, habitable, accessible and culturally appropriate. Community shelter committees must be established with equal participation of women and men, identifying skilled women and men and adolescent girls and boys who can support shelter construction. It is further suggested that coordination and gender networks should provide technical support and monitor gender-specific indicators and several other useful ideas.

The important point to make here is that one can find enough policy papers, guidelines, standards, tools, strategies and suggestions regarding the importance of providing more effectively for women. Most of the major emergency-response organizations (UN, governments and NGOs) can point to policy papers and guidelines which spell out what the organization strives to do in relation to women. How, then, can this continued discrimination against women be interpreted? We have to challenge ourselves on how well these policies are carried out in practice.

To what extent are strategies for addressing gender dimensions, nicely spun into project proposals and implementation plan at the time of funding, implemented in the field? Are the processes of implementation and rehabilitation participatory? Are women ever consulted in engineering matters, and the design and structure of their newly-constructed houses? Are these infrastructures user/women-friendly? Do women and other vulnerable groups equally benefit from opportunities? And more importantly, do male-dominated disaster organizations with their masculine vision respond effectively to women’s needs and take advantage of their strengths? All these are crucial questions which must be addressed at different levels.

Research methodology

To document and analyse the experiences for this study, I conducted 25 key informants’ interviews with shelter providers: men and women serving in different organizations as social organisers; project managers; expatriates; consultants; engineers and others. In addition to these interviews, I conducted 12 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with men and women beneficiaries from communities, 10 in-depth qualitative interviews particularly with women, the disabled and other vulnerable groups, as well as field visit observations in 20 villages located in two districts - Thatta and Dadu of Southern Sindh.

Other sources included numerous informal talks and conversations with local experts and shelter cluster coordinators, media reports, local research papers and updates from various clusters. A qualitative approach with in-depth interviews based on unstructured interview guides was felt to be the most appropriate research method. It enables guided conversations,

where participants spoke at length and elaborated upon their interpretations and experiences (Fielding 1993).

This study is of importance in the sense that it was conducted during a time (July – December 2011) when the population affected by the 2010 floods was only just being provided with shelters, and when, soon after, the next floods hit many districts of Sindh province causing great damage to the shelters that had been provided. I faced immense problems in reaching certain communities; due to the rains, even the main cities, roads and highways were under water making accessing people very difficult. Nevertheless, it provided me with an opportunity to visit villages in order to assess the resilience of the shelters provided against the disaster and to analyse the experiences of the population at even greater risk of continuous disasters.

For this study, I contacted several international, national and local organizations to ask for their participation. It was interesting to note that some organizations were reluctant to share information regarding their shelter programs, including one of the UN Agencies. Some refused to participate and others didn't even bother to reply to my repeated requests, emails and phone calls, even though they all were informed in advance that the information was to be utilised only for research purposes.

The staff of organizations that participated and cooperated in the study requested anonymity and confidentiality, due to their fear of being quoted anywhere and losing their jobs. While reflecting on weaknesses and failures, staff were even more self-conscious, indeed sometimes providing information on the understanding that it was 'off the record'. Therefore, all participants were reassured that the information would be used anonymously, that quotations would not be identifiable and that care would be taken to avoid citing the names of organizations or professionals in the paper.

Profile of communities

This study was conducted in the two worst hit districts of Southern Sindh - Dadu and Thatta, where the 2010 floods affected 0.92 million (61 per cent) of the population in Dadu and 0.61 million (50 per cent) people in Thatta (OCHA, 2011). This year's (2011) floods added a further 325,000 people in Dadu and 177,758 in Thatta to those affected (NDMA, 2011).

The socio-economic profiles of communities reviewed in this study suggest that poverty is widespread throughout both districts. The majority of communities are mainly involved in farming, livestock-rearing and fishing. However, there are some additional livelihood strategies which have been adopted by local communities which include woodcutting, beeri making (a local method of cigarette making), driving, sewing, masonry work, coal making, and wage labour.

These communities have been engaged in their respective occupations (agriculture and fishing) for generations and consider it their ancestral occupation. Farming communities are largely working as Haris (sharecroppers) or as agricultural labourers. Some of the households also own smaller pieces of agricultural land (2-3 acres), and whose crops were also damaged during the heavy rains and floods. . The absence of rights (e.g. land), lack of access to other productive resources and the non-availability of formal protection and safety nets all further reduce the social resilience and coping capacity of communities against the vulnerabilities in both districts.

The rural society targeted is largely heterogeneous and highly complex. It is governed by the traditional principles of caste, tribe, religion, gender, political affiliation and origin, all of which define the relationship between the poor and the ruling class. Communities are largely dependent on household-based economies, whereby the collective labour available at household level provides a means of living to the members of the household and also acts as a buffer against external risks.

Women manage the household and children, participate equally in livelihood activities within the family and share the work with the men in the fields. A high proportion of women is involved in livestock and agriculture-related activities such as cotton and chilli picking, fetching fodder, and feeding and watering livestock. The skilled women are also engaged in traditional and local handicraft-making and sewing as an economic activity.

Types of service provider and shelter

During the 2010 floods, in Dadu district, 168,112 houses were damaged and in Thatta, around 107,981 houses were destroyed. Due to the 2011 floods, this number has increased by 17,000 in Dadu and 11,325 in Thatta, in terms of partially or fully-damaged houses (NDMA 2011). Currently, between 15 and 22 organizations are providing shelters to communities in both districts including UN agencies, international, national and local NGOs. The international organizations are either directly involved in implementation or constructing shelters through local partners/NGOs. Service providers also include governmental agencies such as the Pakistan Army and Navy, but government organizations are not part of this study due to their inaccessibility.

According to the Shelter clusters, during the 2010 floods, in Thatta alone, between 15 and 20 organizations were committed to providing around 20,000 shelters and in Dadu, 18,000 shelters are expected to be provided by between 14 and 20 organizations, far fewer than the actual needs of people and the number of houses destroyed

In the field, shelters have been provided to communities of varying sizes and designs depending upon the organizations' resources. The cost of the each shelter varies, ranging from PRP 40,000 to 85,000/shelter, and mainly occupied by between 8-12 household members. Some organizations have constructed just one or two rooms for each household; others have provided one or two rooms along with facilities like WASH⁵, kitchen and/or a front corridor.

However, partially-damaged houses have also received support such as roofing material from organizations, depending upon the household's needs. There were also reports of the rebuilding of the community mosque, small bridges and school buildings in villages. Houses and shelters are made up of different materials, known as kacha⁶ and semi-packa⁷ shelters.

⁵ Water, Sanitation and Hygiene – WASH, include toilet, washing sites, hand pumps

⁶ Kacha houses made up of crude materials such as mud-clay bamboos, grass or reeds can't withstand harsh weather

⁷ Semi- Packa houses are concrete structures made up of blocks, un-burnt bricks, wood, bamboo, to last for a longer period of time



Kacha Shelter



Semi-Packa Shelter

Constructed shelters are mainly located at settlements, where people were living prior to the floods. Land rights belong either to the affected population or in the case of their belonging to someone else such as a landlord or government, communities and organizations were provided with their written consent to use the land in order to construct shelters.

Such access to land does not apply to land rights but allows the affected population to use the land for some time and to construct shelters. However, where the provided shelter belongs wholly to the affected household, in the case of their leaving that place, the affected household may dismantle the shelter and reuse the construction material.

The rehabilitation work is still under process. Service providers were found to be totally diverse in their approach, strategies, resources and expertise. All have adopted their own ways of engaging communities, offering resources, and using skilled labour in order to implement shelter projects. The major findings of the study are discussed below in detail.

Findings

This section elaborates upon the major findings which emerged from the field-based gender assessment and the evaluation of the on-going processes and practices associated with the shelter projects funded and implemented by international, national and local organizations. Findings and responses are mixed and far from conclusive, raising the need for further research.

Gender balance in development teams

The marginalisation of women was evident in the staffing patterns of the humanitarian organizations. This paper mainly refers to the staff of shelter projects, not the overall structures of the organizations. The shelter project staff (for example, social organisers, project managers, engineers, finance assistants) were mainly dominated by men. Indeed, in some organizations, only male were recruited for shelter projects. Although a few women were also appointed in junior positions as social organisers, their role was mainly confined to providing health and hygiene trainings to communities rather than contributing towards the gender-related issues of shelter projects.

Further indication of women's marginalisation was found in the employment patterns for technical posts such as shelter project engineers. Interestingly, no female engineers were employed by the organizations under study. In an interview, one of the respondents from an international organization said that 'the shelter projects are often very technical and field based, a man is considered more suitable for such tasks, that's why male candidates are given preference over women applicants'. The belief that women are less competent, especially in engineering tasks, is very much internalised within an organizations' values, preferences and practices, so much so that organizations take such gendered practices for granted.

Participatory assessments and analyses

The assessments followed soon after the 2010 floods. Several UN, governmental, international and local organizations engaged themselves in assessments at different levels for making the overall humanitarian response as effective as possible. It was reported by

organizations that multiple assessments had been carried out for various reasons and purposes. Multiple single agency assessments and a lack of common criteria for needs assessment also meant that humanitarian partners have been unable to jointly prioritise interventions.

It was observed that organizations were not consistent in their assessments, as formats differed and were not compatible, therefore, the organizations' capacity to assess gender needs also varied considerably. Regarding the shelter projects themselves, no comprehensive gender needs assessments were jointly carried out by service providers. The results also show that the assessment teams were mainly dominated by male staff members.

The processes of consultation were also gendered, focusing only on male community members. Consultation with and the participation of women remained insignificant. Unfortunately, the majority of organizations reported that different assessment exercises such as Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), social mapping, seasonal calendars, time charts, wealth and poverty ranking for shelter projects were mainly carried out with the men of the community at local level.

However, given the post-disaster crisis and the urgent need for rehabilitation and reconstruction, the task of collecting and analysing detailed information, and the direct participation of all those affected may seem difficult to achieve. If not all, a minimum number of human requirements are still applicable in the emergency shelter context (UN, Dec 2010). By and large, humanitarian organizations acknowledge the importance of gender needs' assessment and analysis.

It was commendable that some local organizations, with no or limited capacity for gender assessment and analysis had somehow managed to collect gender-disaggregated and vulnerability assessment data at village level. This was particularly the case with organizations looking for international funding for various flood projects, owing to a precondition of the donors wherein projects must promote gender equality, pushing the organization to collect gender-related information.

Yet local organizations were unable to use that information for making shelter projects more gender-sensitive throughout, since they lack gender expertise. The shelter project manager from a local organization said that 'we collected gender disaggregated data during initial assessment and included such information in projects designed and submitted for international funding. But we didn't know how to use such information for making response more gender-friendly at every stage and for each intervention'.

Forming community organizations for shelter projects

The international literature around gender and disaster strongly argues that 'the full community involvement, including women's active participation, improves the efficacy of prevention, relief, reconstruction and transformation efforts' (Graham, 2001). With this in mind, institutions are often advised to develop processes that permit local people to get more involved in making decisions about the kind of change they would like to see in their communities. It has been observed that the group organization, especially during disasters, often opens doors for women as well as raising questions regarding the various aspects and options within their lives.

During the floods, in implementing shelter projects, the majority of service providers formed Community Organizations (COs) or Project Management Committees (PMCs) at village level. Later, some COs became registered entities, others informal community forums with some organizational structure. In each community organization at village level, the head of the household was allowed to be a member of the CO.

Most of the decisions related to the construction of one/two room shelters and the allocation of resources was made by the COs in consultation with service providers. The role of CO/PMCs was remarkable especially with regards to settling land issues with landlords and government functionaries as reported by organizations and communities.

The gendered pattern of membership was observed in COs, as men constituted 95 per cent of the membership of the village organizations. Women's voices remained invisible, therefore, in the process of the design of the shelters, and allocation and access to productive resources. The absence of women from the decision-making forums was particularly problematic for widows, as there was no male within their family available to negotiate their shelter needs within the male-dominated organizations.

Due to social and cultural constraints, women were unable to liaise directly with the organizations providing shelters via the highly male-dominated teams. In such circumstances, women relied heavily on male relatives who were members of the community organizations largely responsible for negotiating and deciding about all matters relating to shelters.

Women feel themselves discriminated. As widow living with two young children explained: 'I was told by the chairman of the community organization that our village was given just 20 one-room shelters, which have already been distributed among community members. I am also from this community but they have not given me any shelter'.

Community share as a major constraint for the vulnerable

The results show that humanitarian organizations have constructed different housing designs and structures. Indeed, in similar villages, two different types of shelters/houses exist. Some organizations have offered kacha and others packa houses to communities depending upon the organizations' funding and resources as well as the local conditions and environment. The basic design and structure of either kacha or packa houses was recommended by organizations to communities, although communities were allowed to make changes or extend their houses if they could afford to.

As a result of the chronic poverty and inability of the communities to invest in housing, the majority of them relied heavily on the organizations' support. It was observed that communities who were offered packa houses seemed more satisfied as compared to those who were only given kacha shelters. As one of the beneficiaries of packa houses explained 'we are very happy now, we own packa houses..., there will be no problems at least during rainy seasons'.

Service providers were extremely diverse in their approach. The organizations that mobilised communities to share the cost of the shelters, ranging from 25 to 40 per cent of the total cost either in the form of cash or labour, argue that a contribution from the community increases people's ownership of the resources, gives them sense of their own home, raises their sense of pride and prestige, and so on. There were also service providers bearing the full cost of

shelter construction without any contribution from the communities; they were of the view that these communities are very poor and unable to bear any cost. Indeed organizations bearing the full cost of shelter paid communities for their labour work performed during the construction of the shelters.

The condition of a community contribution either in the form of cash or labour impacted negatively on the highly vulnerable groups of society, depriving them the chance of shelter and forcing them back into depression. The lack of resources and a labour force was a major setback for widows, older women, women with young children and families headed by children and the disabled.

As a widow said: 'I couldn't build a shelter, because they asked me to arrange money, I have nothing to pay ... I have already lost everything in the floods'. Another woman confided that 'my husband is physically impaired, who can neither earn nor was in a position to perform any labouring work for constructing a shelter. I am discriminated against... because I am weak'. In this gendered equation, those vulnerable groups supported by communities were considered fortunate; unfortunately such support was not available to all.

There were three villages where their communities extended greater support and laboured for free, constructing houses for widows and disabled families. As one woman reported: 'We lost our kacha house, my husband also died in the floods..., but I am thankful to our community's young men who provided free labour for constructing our house'.

It is often advised that the opportunities arising from disaster must not discriminate against anyone; those in dire need with no or limited resources must be given special priority. A very different story emerged from a woman aged 70 years living with her two young daughters, her son and daughter-in-law.

As she informs 'during the floods, when our home was destroyed and the organization extended its support for building our home...., sadly, I couldn't manage to organise my 30 per cent contribution. My married son had some money and constructed a packa room and is now living with his family. My daughters and I have no home to live in... sometimes my son allows us to stay in his room and often asks us to leave',.... The only difference is this that prior to the floods, this was OUR home, where we were all living together.... now it is my son's home, where we cannot stay without his permission'.

In the field, only one UN Agency has applied affirmative action to shelter projects, reserving 10 per cent of the quotas by providing full sponsorship to households in chronic poverty who otherwise couldn't make any contribution. Such arrangements have benefited largely women, children, and households headed by the disabled and elderly as organizations have borne 100 per cent of the cost of building shelters for them.

Building homes for the disabled

Disabled people meet barriers at the every stage of their lives and their human rights are violated more frequently. Poverty and gender both further multiply their difficulties; for instance, disabled women and girls belonging to poor households are at greater risk of victimisation. People with impairments most certainly adopt their own strategies for living with their impairments and as part of the environment they find themselves in, but this does

not mean that disabled people are operating on equal terms or are accepted as part of the norm of gendered humanitarian organizations.

The guiding principles of gender-sensitive development have asked for disadvantaged people to be targeted as a priority in the humanitarian response. However, service providers confirmed that the needs of the disadvantaged, in terms of house design and construction, appear to have never been considered a focus for the majority of the humanitarian organizations involved in providing shelters. As a project coordinator clearly stated, ‘We are unable to meet the needs of ordinary people and you are talking about the disabled. Indeed disabled people, even those belonging to well-off families and living in cities, do not enjoy such facilities. Another shelter project manager said that ‘honestly speaking, we really don’t know how to construct houses for the disabled’.

What does constructing disabled-friendly shelters mean in a disaster situation, when resources are meagre, obviously is a pressing query. In the field I found, one international organization that has constructed many kacha houses for the disabled in the district of Thatta.

This particular organization already possesses immense potential and the capacity for dealing with the difficulties of the disabled and is working alongside people with disabilities and in vulnerable situations. During the floods, the organization fully utilised its previous experience, specialist knowledge and capacity for working with the handicapped in order to build shelters as well as providing a livelihood for disabled people, thus setting quite a different example and providing lessons for other humanitarian organizations.

The manager of the shelter project in his interview informed me that ‘in the floods, building shelter for communities gave us an opportunity to fulfil people’s needs including those with special needs; we mainly focus, defend and promote access to fundamental rights for people with disabilities. It was highly inspiring for us to construct shelters for disabled people/families according to their needs along with developing livelihood options for them’.

User-friendly shelters, along with livelihood support, helps the handicapped population to a great extent in recovering from disasters. A physically disabled man stated, ‘In the floods, my home and small grocery shop were destroyed. Most of the NGOs providing shelters in our area were not interested in helping me, because I was unable to meet their criteria. I was luckily approached by this international organization. They have constructed a shelter according to my needs including a toilet with proper ramp access ..., look at this window, I can easily move, open and close it, as the window height is low....I was also given a wheelchair and a small grant to restart my enterprise. All these arrangements have increased my mobility and my confidence in doing things on my own, as well as my self-esteem within society... I am no longer dependent on others’.

A 50 year-old physically impaired widow, Ms Amir Banu and her family had also been provided with similar facilities such as a two-room shelter, a small grant for a business, a toilet with ramp access and a physical exercise programme by the same organization. She greatly appreciated the organization’s contribution to her life and said, ‘Prior to their support, my life was terrible.... I was dependent on my children, even unable to use the toilet on my own... due to their support, especially the physical exercise programme, I am fairly mobile now’.

Even more interesting was when she talked about her business under the small grant program and explained that she had employed another woman in her village to support her in her

business activity. She said, ‘I cannot carry much weight due to my physical disability, that’s why I have employed another widow woman as my business supporter... She carries all material i.e. cloths and jewellery and accompanies me to sell them in the various villages to women and girls’. It is very satisfying to help her... She too is a very poor woman’.

These examples of designing interventions creatively by focusing on the vulnerable are rare in reality; indeed, ignoring the needs of differently abled people is a common phenomenon. In a disaster especially, responses are designed with only certain people in mind. Humanitarian organizations are also a part of the greater societal whole and it is not unusual for them to work to perceived norms. As such, there did not appear to be much difference between the costs of shelters constructed by this organization who responded to the needs of the handicapped population and those built by organizations which totally ignore disabled peoples’ needs in terms of design and construction.

The main difference lies in becoming more sensitive to the needs of the ignored and developing an infrastructure which responds to their needs. It is also important to realise that if the benefits of the projects are to be maximised, organizations will have to learn from each other’s experiences. Humanitarian organizations with a lower capacity for assessing and understanding the needs of different groups will have to learn from the experiences of organizations with greater focus on and a better understanding of vulnerable groups.

Lack of resources, shifting priorities and women’s unmet needs

All of the humanitarian organizations within this study reported insufficient financial resources and funding to meet the shelter needs of communities. Managers of shelter programs stated, ‘The needs are immense, our resources are meagre, we have to prioritise needs’. It was particularly problematic when, just as humanitarian organizations were busy with the recovery and rehabilitation work of the 2010 floods, the 2011 floods hit several other districts in Sindh.

Organizations reported a shift in their focus and priorities that certainly delayed and distorted the process of rehabilitation in many areas. The head of an international organization reported that ‘this year’s 2011 flood has doubled our development targets and exerted great pressure on the humanitarian community. We were simultaneously working on relief, recovery and rehabilitation’.

Under such circumstances, organizations were compelled to cut budgets and compromise quality of shelters in order to maximise the number of those targeted for relief and recovery. The chief of the shelter project reported that ‘for shelters, our priority was to provide one or two rooms to communities’. But during the field visits to the various villages where shelters have been provided, women said that ‘this would have been great if we had also been provided with the resources to build a kitchen and a baramdah/verandah⁸. As they have not constructed a kitchen and verandah, sometimes we have to cook in scorching heat under the sun’, further adding ‘now no-one is ready to help us in building a kitchen including the men in our family who are now busy in their work’.

The verandah is a very essential part of the traditional houses in the villages of Sindh, for some good reasons too; where people escape to from the stuffy indoors, to catch that blessed

⁸Baramdah is place that extends out of indoors/rooms, usually roofed onto which rooms open

breeze especially during very hot weather. Families gather, children play and women perform various household chores on the verandah. Unfortunately, such needs were never discussed or prioritised by the male decision-makers, responsible for making all important decisions related to construction, with women were completely excluded from the decision-making forums at the beginning of the shelter projects.

Sustainability and disaster risk reduction

In Sindh province, the millions hit by this year's flood are those who had lost almost everything during the previous year's flood and now have literally nothing to live on. People have lost their crops, livestock and homes for the second time around. The local experts argue that the recent flood disasters were not merely unkind acts of nature, but instead actually occurred due to bad planning, poor coordination, institutional chaos, design issues, the unequal distribution of water, political interference and several other problems with the water infrastructure. Longer-term measures that help reduce the vulnerability of community members to hazards are of fundamental importance. Further, in order to promote gender equality, hazard mitigation and vulnerability reduction, one needs to focus on all levels - micro, meso and macro levels.

The NDMA (2010) suggests promoting the increased use of hazard-resilient design in rural housing especially in hazard-prone areas. In interviews, professionals from different organizations claimed that despite limited resources, efforts were made to raise the plinth height of the shelters, with strong corners and foundations, thus making shelters more resilient to the next disaster. But communities argue that such measures at micro level rarely work in cases where the village height is below the normal inundation level or where huge irrigation and drainage infrastructures are poorly managed.

Men and women raised serious concerns over the irrigation and drainage network in Sindh, as they have experienced a drains backflow which inundated many villages and poses a permanent threat to local people and the area's development. As the manager of the Community Organization (CO) said, 'Our homes will not withstand it if the drains flood again. Government must ensure that the systems are put in place to keep in check the increasing floods'. Another member of the CO stated, 'We are really worried.. because the infrastructures are poorly and ineffectively designed and manage to carry only heavy storm water. I fear that we'll be flooded again, again and again....'.

During field visits, women from communities which were provided with kacha shelters with mud walls and plastic sheet roofing complained of greater damage to these structures particularly during heavy rainfall. The women greatly emphasised the point that secure roofs are of particular importance in order to securely store assets (livestock, grain, food and farming tools) away from the flood waters.

Coordination mechanisms and technical support

Soon after the floods, it was felt by the humanitarian community that national as well as provincial capacity, especially of the Pakistan government, was insufficient for overseeing coordination. The UN progressively set up several clusters (food, shelter, protection, agriculture, WASH and etc.) and coordinated mechanisms at national, provincial and hub levels to facilitate the floods response effectively and efficiently. Later, in order to make

coordination more effective, clusters were brought closer to lower - district level which included major governmental, international, national and local NGOs involved in district level flood response.

For instance, in both Thatta and Dadu districts, there are Housing Early Recovery Working Group (HERWG), consisting of the majority of the organizations currently providing shelters. HERWGs mainly work as a coordination and consultation forum, where between 14 and 20 organizations involved in providing shelters meet regularly, either monthly or fortnightly, while sharing projects updates and reflecting on various implementation issues in the field.

In interviews, the respondents, especially members of HERWG in the districts of Thatta and Dadu showed dissatisfaction over the working of the forums and said that HERWGs provide insufficient leadership. As one female social organiser highlighted, ‘We don’t bring real issues to the discussions, I know some organizations are providing poor quality shelters ... we have been pointing out several issues with their shelters as reported by communities but they never listen to us’ .

Some respondents from organizations also agree that somehow cluster coordination and working groups have helped in at least reducing overlapping problems. A social organiser who often attended HERWG’s meetings said, ‘Now that organizations have their defined areas of operation for providing shelters to communities, we avoid working in villages where some other organizations are already involved in the response’.

Interview respondents from various organizations also reported that gender issues are rarely discussed in HERWG’s meetings, nor is any technical support available to take up gender issues in the field. Although, during the floods, the Gender Task Force (GTF) was also set up for some time, mandated to provide technical support to all stakeholders, members and clusters.

While reflecting on the experiences of GTF in Southern Sindh, a Senior Gender Advisor stated, ‘the response of various clusters towards gender issues varies mainly depending upon clusters’ leads. In some cases despite repeated requests, the clusters’ leads paid little attention towards gender issues raised by the GTF.

Pushing the humanitarian community towards gender mainstreaming itself seems very challenging, as some of them also consider addressing gender as an additional burden. The organizations generally favour and feel more responsibility towards their own agencies’ interests and priorities rather than the gender mainstreaming of the response. Broadly speaking, there is an insufficient commitment and accountability towards gender issues’.

Increased women’s workload

It has been observed that institutions making decisions related to disaster risk management policy and legislation are invariably male dominated. Often, women are seen as vulnerable victims rather than active change agents. The findings of this study suggest that women’s participation in the construction of shelters had been enormous, and included children.

Women and children seemed busy throughout the construction cycle, performing several tasks ranging from arranging water for construction to putting up walls. Indeed some of the

tasks traditionally undertaken by women, such as mud plastering, were widely performed by women during shelter construction. Some women were engaged in roof construction as well, because of their lighter weight. This was particularly the case with kacha houses that otherwise cannot stand much weight.

Women reported that all these activities increased their workload. ‘We worked days and nights, sometimes 18 hours a day in order to complete the construction of our houses’ was often reported in interviews. The most vulnerable suffered even more when the able-bodied male members of their families left their homes to work outside or find jobs and a livelihood, leaving all tasks for the women to take care of, including shelter construction. A woman informed me that ‘it was very difficult for me when my husband left home for work; I was constructing the shelter, managing the household chores, taking care of the children and the old-age members of our household’.

Searching for a livelihood by male family members also caused delays to completing shelters in good time. Under such circumstances, men and women were divided: women were overburdened and gave greater priority to completing the shelters first, whilst men reported more pressure to provide food and a livelihood for their families, ignoring constructing their home as a priority.

However, the women’s satisfaction, sense of empowerment and ownership in building their own homes was immeasurable. As one said, ‘It is my home, I personally constructed it’. Another reported, ‘There are 12 of us living in this one room shelter, but even so, we are so happy, at least we have constructed packa shelters with greater resilience to disasters’.

Other constraints

During field visits to some villages, widows, especially those who lacked or had lost their Computerized National Identity Card (CNIC) during the floods, reported that they were discriminated against in getting shelters, having been informed by the male heads of the community organizations formed for shelter projects that only those with a CNIC could receive shelter support. More worryingly, organizations appeared to lack direct contact with women, and only involved men in the processes of shelter construction, whilst directly or indirectly ignoring the vulnerable.

The scope of the disaster has made monitoring a major challenge for the humanitarian community. Basic measures to enhance gender monitoring have not been taken; existing monitoring is therefore agency-based, focusing on accountability towards bilateral funding and the organization’s own reporting needs, rather than the community.

Conclusion and recommendations

The responses, issues and analysis reflected above are suggestive and are far from conclusive. Humanitarian organizations, professionals, the government and those affected need to explore women’s and other vulnerable groups’ experiences of disaster recovery and rehabilitation. Women, in fact, are potentially competent to minimise the loss and work towards rehabilitation after the disaster. Poorly planned humanitarian actions that assume men’s role as central rather ignore women, rendering them powerless.

The lack of women's representation and participation at every stage of the response was evident in this case. As such, no comprehensive gender needs assessments and implementation of outstanding gender needs were found in the response. Considering the sheer scale of the emergency, lack of gender sensitivity and limited resources, by and large needs of women and vulnerable were compromised and ignored. Broadly there is an insufficient commitment to gender equality in the humanitarian response.

The absolute need for secure shelter was manifested in this case, but in a disaster shelter program, securing one's livelihood and improved WASH components are highly desired by those affected, especially women and the disabled. It may be noted that the most popular participatory strategies, for instance, community contribution for constructing shelter, may work against the vulnerable and push them back into the vulnerability cycle. In such cases, affirmative action must be taken to provide full relief and compensation to the highly vulnerable sections of society.

Most importantly, if a shelter project is planned to benefit the whole community, the planners should be aware that the demands of one group of people do not necessarily reflect the demands of other groups. Considering a simple requirement of disabled members of a household, such as the height of the doors and windows in a room, or easy access to the toilet can make the infrastructure more effective and responsive to the vulnerable. There is a need to go beyond formal engineering structures and think innovatively, whilst keeping in view local contexts, needs, and geography, as well as to build up the human and institutional capacity in gender mainstreaming within Pakistani disaster management.

Unfortunately, the majority of shelter projects' professionals reported no, or very little, training on gender. If professionals occupying important positions in projects are going to address community needs, then they need to recognise that communities also include women, children, minority groups, the disabled and others. The evidence suggests that organizations with a special focus on the vulnerable such as widows, children and the disabled and improved capacity seem better at recognising gender shelter needs and incorporating such needs throughout the different phases of shelter project management.

Despite the many problems in Pakistan's flood response, there exists good and gender-friendly practices within the humanitarian response. However, such knowledge is rarely considered by all stakeholders. As with gender guidelines, the tools and strategies developed after years of work by the humanitarian community and governments were not fully incorporated into the flood response.

When it comes to referring to gender guidelines or tools prepared by humanitarian community for making flood response more gender friendly, only 10 per cent of interviewees indicated that they had read IASC and NDMA gender guidelines, 90 per cent of respondents said that they know about gender guidelines but never bothered to read or refer to them. Indeed, most of the organizations have very well-written and well-designed gender mainstreaming policy papers that reflect what organizations strive to do in relation to gender. But little is achieved in reality.

Yet the coordination mechanisms and forums already working appear less effective in bringing and promoting good gender practices into the flood response and monitoring the progress of the overall response. Organizations seem busy developing their own success stories, rather than learning from failures that may also include significant lessons for all. Accountability and attention to gender and vulnerability need to be strengthened. All good

and bad practices need to be discussed openly at all levels, making implementation more accountable to the people.

Experiences resulting from the Pakistani floods also clearly show the need to adapt the response to the context and conditions on the ground. International and national standards related to gender serve as guidelines for what should be achieved, but are never properly taken up in the implementation of the response. It is clear that, given the extent of the disaster, low capacity, and meagre resources, it may be difficult to follow internationally agreed standards and guidelines including gender, but even so, minimum standards do apply.

The humanitarian response must ensure and maintain the minimum criteria for gender equality. There is a need for robust arrangements and mechanisms in order to ensure gender equality throughout the disaster response at all levels. Women and women's groups must be consulted and given the opportunity to participate in decision-making and consultation forums.

Organizations' priorities should also reflect women's priorities, and with this in mind, women, women's I/NGOs and government need to actively and strategically put gender issues on the table of both current and forthcoming processes of a disaster response. Further research, open access to information and strong coordination, monitoring and lobbying are of great importance for gender equality. Humanitarian response needs to ensure that gender issues are not subsumed within the broader development priorities.

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