



The Gender and Disaster Network – <http://www.gdnonline.org>

Are there significant positive changes on the status of women in the context of recent disaster events/humanitarian crises or are women and their needs still being left out? What is missing or lacking that we should continue to work on? As part of GDN's celebration of International Women's month, we asked members to share their thoughts on the status of women in the context of recent disaster events or humanitarian crises and here are their reflections.

"Putting the changes in a historical perspective the disaster response community has made a 380 degree turn. I have been working in disaster response since the early 1990's when how to engender disaster response was not even a question that was asked. Fast forward to the tsunami response and how proactive the disaster response community was in alerting responders that they needed to take steps to prevent trafficking of women and children. Even though the alarm sounded might have been too loud, when it comes to trafficking, better safe than sorry. More significantly, the response highlighted the fact that we have advanced light years in engendering disaster response. And much of that progress is a result of the efforts of GDN and its members".

"While most practitioners understand that they need to engender disaster response, they still conceive it to relate exclusively to women. We need many more case studies that illustrate the different ways that disasters impact men and women differently - both positively and negatively. Stories are what people remember and what bring concepts alive for people."

"We need to be preparing the next generation of women leaders - in both donor countries and 'recipient' countries. The empowerment of women really needs to begin in their teenage years. I was struck in India by how many teenaged women were interested in being trained to do search and rescue work. What better ways to empower them than by creating opportunities for them to help their communities and to be recognized as heros when they actually do so."

Mary Schwoebel, Ph.D., Independent scholar and consultant

¿Podría usted decir que hay cambios positivos significativos en el status de las mujeres en el contexto de eventos desastrosos recientes o crisis humanitarias o las mujeres y sus necesidades están todavía quedando fuera?

“El último evento con consecuencias desastrosas –diferenciadas- para la población, en Guatemala, fue la tormenta tropical Stan en 2006.”

“Conceptualmente se pueden reconocer avances. Por ejemplo el programa nacional de reconstrucción reconoce que es necesaria la aplicación del enfoque de gestión de riesgo en procesos de reconstrucción. Esto implicaría que la vulnerabilidad es un factor tomado en cuenta en todas las decisiones aplicables tanto al manejo del desastre, como en las etapas de rehabilitación, reconstrucción, etc.”

(Conceptually, advances can be recognized. For example, the national program for reconstruction recognizes that the application of risk management approach in reconstruction processes is necessary. This would imply that vulnerability is a factor taken into account in all the decisions applicable as much to the handling of the disaster, like in the stages of rehabilitation, reconstruction, etc.)

“La falta de conocimiento e información que afecta más a las mujeres por razones históricas, sumada a la discriminación étnica, son sólo dos de los factores que se convierten en agravantes de la vulnerabilidad de las mujeres sobre todo cuando se analizan a la luz de criterios “técnicos” aplicados en el manejo de los albergues -por ejemplo- y basados en consideraciones de heterogeneidad de los grupos que se ubican en ellos.”

(The lack of knowledge and information affects women more for historical reasons, added to ethnic discrimination, these are only two factors that mainly aggravate the vulnerability of women when they are analyzed in light of "technical" criteria applied in the handling of shelters for example, and based on considerations of heterogeneity of the groups that are located in them.)

“En la práctica, se reconoce que las instituciones nacionales, a pesar de declaraciones políticas, no conocen y/o no aplican pautas más allá de las consideradas en manuales sobre manejo de desastres las cuales no incluyen consideraciones de género y si las incluyen, no ofrecen pautas para su aplicación. Una reciente discusión en la que participaron instituciones nacionales e internacionales y diversas ONG locales, puso en evidencia que la violencia sexualizada, la inseguridad y los conflictos sociales no sólo no eran considerados como importantes sino que, además -pese a la evidencia que afectaban especialmente a mujeres y niñas- no estaban siendo observados y tratados adecuadamente.”

(It is actually recognized that the national institutions, in spite of political declarations, do not know and/or do not apply guidelines beyond the ones in the manuals in dealing with disasters, which do not include gender

considerations and if ever they include them, they do not offer guidelines for its application. One recent discussion participated in by national and international institutions and diverse local NGOs, gave evidence that sexual violence, insecurity and social conflicts were not just considered unimportant but that, in addition - in spite of the evidence which shows that women and children are particularly affected, they were not being observed and treated suitably.")

“Podemos mencionar dos dimensiones que explican en parte esta situación. Una es la de la permanencia de prácticas que se expresan en una desventaja y marginación de un sexo respecto al otro (desarrollo de acciones que se basan en escuchar la opinión o las propuestas o las necesidades de liderazgos comunitarios visibles que casi siempre son masculinos, organización de comités ad-hoc para responder a la coyuntura de la emergencia o del desastre, basados en estos mismos liderazgos, criterios de distribución de ayuda humanitaria aplicados por personal técnico que carece de formación y/o sensibilidad para comprender las desigualdades y diferencias entre grupos de damnificados, etc.). La segunda, hace referencia a la falta de institucionalización, conceptual y práctica, de nuevos conceptos.”

("We can mention two dimensions that explain this situation partly. One is the prevalence of practices that deliberately puts in disadvantage and marginalize one sex with respect to the other (actions which are based on the opinion or proposals or the needs of visible community leaders who are almost always male, organization of ad hoc committees to respond to the emergency or disaster based on these same leaderships, distribution criteria of humanitarian aid used by technical personnel that lack information and/or sensitivity to include/understand the inequalities and differences between groups of victims, etc.). Second, it makes reference to the lack of institutionalization, conceptual and practical, of new concepts.")

“Al menos en esta última experiencia guatemalteca el manejo de la emergencia o el desastre no incluye consideraciones que reflejen la realidad del país. Por ejemplo, en la esfera de las organizaciones que trabajan el concepto de seguridad democrática se han generado insumos que explican las causas y los efectos que la violencia tiene en la propia población y, específicamente, en las mujeres –sobre todo jóvenes- pero estos nuevos aportes no son parte aún del quehacer de las instituciones que atienden la emergencia. Otro ejemplo es el que se refiere a las características de la migración, vista incluso como factor de vulnerabilidad y los efectos que tiene en las familias, especialmente en las mujeres, quienes al momento de la emergencia o el desastre, reflejan condiciones que no están siendo consideradas por dichas instituciones bien por desconocimiento o por un apego a una preparación técnica que fue adquirida cuando estas migraciones reflejaban otras coyunturas históricas y otras características.”

(At least in this last experience of Guatemala the management of emergency or disaster does not include considerations that reflect the reality of the country. For example, within organizations who work towards securing democracy, they have generated inputs that explain the causes and effects of violence in the population and, specifically, in young women - but these new contributions are still not part of the task of the

institutions which attend to emergency. Another example is one that talks about the characteristics of migration - viewed as one of the factors of vulnerability - and the effects it has in the families, especially in women, who at the time of the emergency or disaster, reflect conditions which show that they are not being considered or are being ignored by these institutions or by an attachment to a technical preparation that was acquired when these migrations reflected other historical conjunctures and other characteristics.")

"Dicho en otros términos, las valiosas experiencias que derivan de una mayor participación institucional, en el manejo de la emergencia o el desastre, como la observada en la etapa post tsunami demostraron claramente el desbalance de género en la ocurrencia del desastre, en sus efectos cualitativos y cuantitativos, en el manejo de la emergencia y del desastre y en las etapas de rehabilitación y de reconstrucción. No obstante, y pese al cúmulo de esfuerzos de divulgación de estas famosas lecciones aprendidas, en países donde el estatus económico y social de las mujeres, refleja la lógica estructural de la discriminación, su situación no ha cambiado. Es más, la anunciada frecuencia y severidad de estos eventos, derivadas de los efectos del cambio climático, parece, nos encontrará en las mismas condiciones de vulnerabilidad, ya debatidas a fondo en interminables eventos que, no obstante, se siguen realizando, casi a sugerir una deriva oportunista del tema."

("In other words, the valuable experiences derived from a greater institutional participation, in the handling of the emergency or the disaster, as observed in the stage post tsunami clearly demonstrated an imbalance of sort in the occurrence of the disaster, in their qualitative and quantitative effects, in the handling of the emergency and the disaster and in the stages of rehabilitation and reconstruction. However, and in spite of the efforts to disseminate these lessons learned, in countries where economic and social status of women reflects the structural logic of discrimination, this situation has not changed. Moreover it seems that the announced frequency and severity of these events, derivatives of the effects of climatic change, will find us in the same conditions of vulnerability, already debated thoroughly in endless events which nevertheless, keep on being realized, almost suggesting that they merely want to create opportunities for themselves out of the subject.")*

-Rosa Sánchez, consultora independiente, investigadora social y docente en Guatemala y Centroamérica en el nivel de maestría

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