

**HARD-WON LESSONS:
RESPONDING TO WOMEN'S INTERESTS AND NEEDS IN THE GULF COAST OIL SPILL**

US Gender and Disaster Resilience Alliance

Please visit our website for more information, resources and ideas for action: <http://www.usgdra.org/>

The GDRA offers these considerations for shaping a national response that respects and builds on women's past experience. Much has already been learned in the US about how the lives of women and men, boys and girls are transformed by disasters of all kinds. The GDRA stands ready to help put this knowledge to use through dialogue, communications networks, local subject experts, bibliographies, case studies from past US disasters, public awareness materials, a consultant roster, good practice guides and more.

1. Listen to women—seek them out, bring them together, ask for their ideas, hear their concerns, respect difference. The expertise and experience of women are essential as they play lead roles in the local environmental groups now responding to the spill.
2. Communicate directly with women and with men—use media that reach different groups of women and men of different ages in different cultural groups, and ensure that messages reflect their everyday lives and realities.
3. Make space for women to fully and meaningfully participate –include them in decision-making roles around response and recovery work now and in the years to come. Seek out African American, Vietnamese American, Native American women and Latinas from hard-hit communities with important survival skills.
4. Support grassroots women's groups—know that much of women's work is behind the scenes in disasters, where they play critical but readily overlooked roles, often in local groups and networks that are lifelines for women in crisis and for women's solidarity and resilience.
5. Target economic relief to women, too—whether in jobs related to fishing or tourism or both, women's incomes are jeopardized, and they will have to work harder and longer when family income drops.
6. Intervene now to reduce violence against women—help women's groups respond, educate the public about the risk, give women meaningful prevention guidance and resources for self-protection, now. Learn from previous interventions against gender-based violence in disasters, including the Exxon Valdez spill.
7. Protect women's reproductive health, and men's—minimize exposure to toxics with indeterminate effects on fetal and maternal health, plan now to monitor and evaluate possible effects and mitigate these to the extent possible.
8. Support girls—target teens of both sexes in clean-up jobs, with equitable payment and responsibilities, protect their work and education options in cash-strapped families, develop and support their leadership and communication skills as the spill's effects become known in the long term.
9. Care for the care givers—women (and men, in growing numbers) provide essential emotional and hands-on care for others, often at their own expense. They need child care, respite care, economic support and mental health outreach that recognizes the socio-emotional effects of the spill now and in the future.

10. Work with men and men's groups —ask how they are coping as sons, partners, husbands, and fathers, determine what can be through men's groups now to minimize interpersonal conflict, violence, and self-destructive uses of drugs and/or alcohol, as well as to protect their livelihoods.
11. Help women help one another—support learning exchanges among women to build on what they have learned in past US disasters, environmental or technological; enable witnessing projects planned and implemented by women leaders with first-hand experience.
12. Focus on strength—learn from the achievements of local women who push back against environmental groups dominated by men and corporations. Frame recovery around the regional work of women-led organizations active in the areas of health, housing, labor, youth, racism, economic and environmental sustainability and social justice, as well as gender issues.
13. Respect the human right of self-determination for women and men, boys and girls equally—ask, listen and respond in ways that help all those affected achieve the futures they envision.
14. Value culture—the women and men of this region have unique cultural roots which can and should determine how long-term recovery is planned and implemented, especially in communities at risk of losing land, livelihood, people, language and legacy.
15. Partner with women formally and informally—with deep roots in affected communities, grassroots women and women's groups are not “disaster tourists,” and not going away. They are your partners for the long haul.
16. Document difference—keep good records by age and sex, ask “where are the women?”, monitor the effects on both women and men, and how they cope with the short and long-term effects of the spill.
17. Avoid the language of “special populations” – look at the intersections in everyone's lives of capacity and strength, and focus on how gender, class, ethnicity, age and other factors interact in our everyday lives.
18. Ask for women's feedback—bring women and men together, early and often, to monitor the effectiveness of short-and long-term recovery strategies.
19. Compensate women's time and expertise—include them as relief and recovery experts, as community monitors of recovery programs, as local consultants with critically needed local expertise.
20. Hold corporate decision-makers responsible—ensure that relief checks or other payments are shared by women and men, that the resources offered are those that women, as well as men, consider essential for Coastal families striving to reclaim and rebuild their lives.
21. Take a social justice human rights approach—listen to women leaders with generations of experience and insight into what can and must be done for Coastal communities to recover sustainably and for the prevention of future environmental degradation.

FOR MORE INFORMATION: Please contact us for specific references and also consult the Gender and Disaster Sourcebook for US and global gender and disaster reports: <http://www.gdnonline.org/sourcebook/>. The global GDN website includes five *Gender Notes* with practical tips on mitigation, risk communication, disability, men and masculinity, and on gender mainstreaming in the global Hyogo Framework for Action to reduce disaster risk. You'll also find *Six Principles for Engendered Relief and Reconstruction*: http://www.gdnonline.org/resources/gdn_gender_equality_in_disasters.pdf.

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