

1st PrepCom for the 3rd World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction
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Co-Chair's Dialogue #1, July 14, 2014
Women's Major Group

Thank you chair. Distinguished colleagues,

My name is Eleanor Blomstrom of the Women's Environment and Development Organization and a member of the Women's Major Group.

The Hyogo Framework has been held up as one of the global agreements that includes a strong gender perspective and also gender equality as a cross-cutting issue within the HFA. This is a success. At my organization, which works also within the climate negotiations and the post-2015 sustainable development agenda, we have drawn on this strong basis in the framework as an example to follow. As you all know, the HFA states: "A gender perspective should be integrated into all disaster risk management policies, plans and decision-making processes."

We've seen as a success that the HFA recognized the need for data, for women's leadership and constructive engagement. The HFA also identified women as a vulnerable group, which is a qualified success; being "vulnerable" can compromise women's ability to take on leadership roles and engage constructively.

We know there are some gaps in the HFA. Many institutions and governments were not able to implement toward gender equality as a cross-cutting issue – for example on the collection and use of data, or a gender analysis of it to apply it to programming; on facilitating women's leadership and active, meaningful participation; or accessing benefits from DRR programming.

And we would like to highlight that it's important to recognize women as more than a vulnerable group. They are vulnerable in some cases, or form part of other vulnerable groups (especially taking into account intersecting inequalities such as disability, ethnicity, gender identity), but vulnerability is not an inherent characteristic of women. It is a result of marginalization in many cases – due to prevailing structures and social and economic norms and constraints. The specific constraints can vary in different regional and country contexts so I will not try to present women or gender differentiated impacts and experiences as monolithic.

Women are actors in this process and I'll share a few examples from some of my colleagues to show the success of the activities of women as stakeholders; these could be scaled up or incorporated into HFA2 to ensure gender-sensitive programming and guidelines for DRR.

The first example contributes to the HFA priorities of "Diversify policy-making and decision making" & "Risk assessment and monitoring" – including in the response to disaster. It also supported DRR governance and strengthening institutions. After the great Earthquake in Japan, women's needs were not met in the shelters, and responding to the need was hindered by a lack of communication between

existing Gender Equality Centers – set up from Beijing – and the DRR processes. When the GEC realized the suffering due to lack of privacy and threats of violence to women in shelters, they took action to help – providing needs assessments and services. Women involved in leading the action follow up with government official and were able to effect change in Japanese law so that the GEC can participate in DRR efforts during any future disaster.

In terms of fostering resilience, risk education, a colleague in Kenya participates in Gender Based Violence Working Groups that work cross-sectorally to address complex humanitarian emergencies, including results of conflicts. Women's organizations also worked in the aftermath of complex humanitarian emergencies with large relief organizations such as the Red Cross to ensure that the response is gender sensitive, for example in terms of food distribution. The method was adapted to distribute through women, including women heads of households to ensure benefits for the whole family/household, including the men. There had been challenges in men with multiple wives prioritizing the distribution.

To reduce underlying risk (or threats), an all-female peacekeeping force in Liberia resulted in decreased reports of sexual abuse and violence against women, which has significant implications for reducing risk in complex humanitarian emergencies and food relief assistance distribution. Thus it is important to explicitly consider actions to reduce risk of domestic and sexual violence.

Thank you.