

Terms of Reference

DER Working Group on Gender and Diversity in Disasters

Introduction:

Cyclones, tornadoes, floods regularly visit Bangladesh, one of the most densely populated countries in the world with a population of around 130 million people¹ over a surface of 144,000 square kilometres only. Women represent nearly half of the population. The country also suffers from typical development problems of illiteracy, high population growth, poor health, and wide scale poverty. Thus when a natural disaster strikes, Bangladeshi women are even more vulnerable because of traditional social, economic and cultural patterns which marginalize and discriminate them. For instance, women were highly over-represented among the 138,000 people killed in the 1991 cyclone. Several other studies also confirm that women are usually much more affected than men when a disaster strikes, and when recovery begins. Increased violence against women is often a secondary effect of post disaster stress all over the world. Also, the poverty is over-represented among children and women, particularly in female-headed households in Bangladesh, which makes children and women more vulnerable to natural disasters.

Since the roles and responsibilities of men and women are different due to patriarchal power relations and the unequal condition and position of women and their subordination in comparison to men do exist; their needs, level of risk, perception of risks, vulnerabilities and capacities are different. While there has been increasing understanding that gender planning is a vital component of development programmes, it has been less widely been practiced in emergency works. Some of the key problems related to gender and emergency response are given below:

- Women are generally excluded from most formal decision-making processes during the disaster preparedness or response within their village or urban community. Though women are playing a pivotal role in holding together and helping it to recover, whereas most of the time they are treated as victims/burdens rather counting women's potentiality.
- There is a lack of using gender analysis in capacity and vulnerability assessments. Gender data are not consistently collected before, during, and after natural disasters, nor are gender relations more broadly investigated in emergency contexts. Hence, without the proper knowledge of specific factors facilitating and hindering women and men, the emergency response and reconstruction interventions cannot be effective.
- Disaster interventions often lack gender sensitivity. For example, the relief materials are not containing sufficient items as per the women's need. The post relief interventions may address few of the practical and strategic needs of women such as location of separate camps, sanitary latrines, etc.

With Bangladesh beset by a myriad of natural disasters, it will be essential to live with disasters and response to recurring natural disasters. Nevertheless, women are not only victims, they can also be turned into the **“agents of change”**. Through their strength and realism, women, given the opportunity, can and play a central role in saving lives and managing relief response. Further, women and men, working together, can identify those

¹ Population Census 2001

hazards that are threats to their homes and livelihoods and work together to build safer communities.

Differences in races, social, economic, cultural and religious backgrounds as well as physical and mental disabilities have been leading to social exclusion and marginalisation of specific individuals and groups in Bangladesh. A disaster impacts people differently according to such differences, and specifically impact more significantly those who are in the bottom of the society, religious minorities,² (e.g. Hindu, Christian, Buddhists, etc), ethnicity groups³, refugees (e.g. Urdu speaking Biharis), people in a lower caste (especially among Bengali Hindus), people living with HIV/AIDS, children and the elderly, and the disabled. A disaster drives those individuals and groups to increased vulnerability during and after the disaster, unless special attention were to be paid in their access to relief and recovery assistance. More probes are needed to identify the dimensions of the diversity existing in rural Bangladesh society and how a disaster affects those individuals and groups. Some organisations have started undertaking interventions, which address gender and diversity needs. It is therefore appropriate and timely to work towards generating new knowledge, sharing existing information, and build on lessons learned from the field.

Vision:

DER member's assistance is appropriate and reaches the most vulnerable people in disasters.

Mission:

To ensure that the DER members appropriately address the gender and diversity issues in disasters.

Objectives:

- a. To make the disaster response organisations aware and committed so that the diverse needs of different groups (women/men, minorities, people living with HIV/AIDS, children and elderly, the disabled, etc) will be addressed effectively in disaster response.
- b. To improve the DER Group capacity on gender and diversity analysis in its disaster response by developing an enhanced level of:
 - Common understanding on gender and diversity sensitivity;
 - Common standards on gender and diversity in emergency field operations; and take actions (eg. capacity building) for this purpose.
- c. To create a platform where DER members can share and learn their experience and exchange the views, limitations and challenges on the theme.

Membership:

At the beginning the membership of the thematic working group will be limited to organizations, which are active in gender and diversity concerns and issues. The group is composed of members with capacity in gender issues. Meanwhile, this group can consult with technical networks [such as National Forum for the Organisation Working with Disability (NFOWD), etc.] to ensure the wider dimensions of diversity and inequality are taken into consideration. It can also consult with the local community to ensure that the indigenous knowledge and perceptions are addressed properly, as appropriate.

² Out of the total population, about 88.3% Muslim are the majority and the rest are Hindu, Christian and Buddhists.

³ The indigenous people with over 1% of the total population.

Role of the group:

The group should assume the following roles, which should be reviewed annually.

[Preparedness to Response]

1. To share the ideas/documents and best practices (national and international) related with humanitarian response work on gender and diversity perspective;
2. To plan and propose a common gender and diversity principle for DER Group;
3. To ensure the DER activities and documents related to practical and strategic needs of gender and diversity are based on a gender and diversity sensitive analysis;
4. To build the Working Group members' and the DER member's capacity to address disaster response and preparedness in gender and diversity sensitive way by organising training/orientation to fill the gap.

[During Emergency Response]

5. To encourage incorporation of the findings of the rapid assessment into planning and implementation of the relief operation.

[Post Response]

6. To accumulate and disseminate the lessons learned from gender and diversity perspective among the wider group members through different platforms;
7. To raise policy issue on gender and diversity for DER Group based on experience.

Role of the Lead Agency:

1. To initiate, facilitate and lead the entire process of the Working Group to achieve its objectives, including convening meetings and set agenda on regular basis, taking necessary follow-up actions in consultation with the Working Group and the support of the DER Secretariat.

Role of the Secretariat:

In consultation with the lead agency, the Secretariat shall;

1. Facilitate and maintain communications between DER members and the Working Group regularly and systematically;
2. Ensure the provision of secretariat facilities and administrative support to the Working Group including maintaining communications among members, and collecting and disseminating relevant information for its members and any other agencies involved;
3. Make a necessary budget provision for the implementation of Working Group activities.

Format of the Working Group Meeting

1. The Working Group shall meet on regular basis. Furthermore, the Working Group members and the Secretariat may request the lead agency to convene the meeting as required.
2. The agenda of the meeting is primarily set by the lead agency. The members of the Working Group and the Secretariat may propose an agenda as appropriate.
3. The hosting role of meetings shall rotate among Working Group members.