

THE HUIAROU COMMISSION
reports findings from the
GUJARAT DISASTER WATCH

Conducted by grassroots women from Turkey and India.
10-13 February, 2002

SUMMARY

Disaster presents an opportunity to recreate communities from a habitat point of view. Reports from grassroots women from post earthquake communities in Turkey, Gujarat and Latur, India indicate that the involvement of community-based organizations in policy and planning processes can augment efforts to transform disaster into healthy development.

INTRODUCTION

Statistical and systemic analyses of disaster response are becoming more sophisticated by the day. Excellent as they are, they tend to lack first-hand evaluations of relief efforts from its "users," those community members who experience not only the disaster but also the well-intended efforts of others to help them recover.

Between February 10 and 13, 2002, five grassroots women who survived the 1999 Marmara earthquake in Turkey traveled to six villages in Gujarat to observe recovery progress. Then, in a workshop with 175 grassroots women survivors of the Gujarat and Latur quakes, all the women evaluated their own performance as well as that of the government. Major findings are below.

Swam Shikshan Prayog, a Mumbai-based NGO which seeks to bring women into the development process hosted guests from the Turkish Foundation for the Support of Women's work. GROOTS International and the Huairou Commission also supported the event.

LOOKING BACK

WOMEN'S APPRECIATION EXTENDED TO THE GOVERNMENT FOR:

- Delivering immediate care
- Effective use of various relief agencies
- Involvement of indigenous NGOs
- Response to community demands.

WOMEN'S IDENTIFICATION OF PROBLEMS

- Rather than developing rebuilding plans to strengthen whole communities, and equip them for the future, the building program was restricted to a simple one to one building replacement scheme.
- Women were not consulted in disaster rehabilitation plans. It is likely that they would have placed higher priorities on re-opening schools, establishing health care systems – especially in providing information about post-trauma care.
- Not only was government water delivery unreliable, thus causing slow down in construction, but it failed to strongly support the integration of water storage and harvesting systems.
- Inadequate information on entitlements and the rebuilding programs caused frustration and anxiety in an already compromised environment. The absence of reliable explanations wasted resources and helped create an environment for corruption.
- Entitlement procedures were not beneficiary driven. The government, for example, failed to invest in temporary housing – thus forcing the owner to drawn down their capital.

Some homeowners, for example, were unable to qualify for a house because they needed to present ration cards to provide identity. Unfortunately the government stopped issuing ration cards 4 years prior to the earthquake. Second installments for construction of homes, furthermore, were often delayed. This added to the ultimate cost of the building because laborers often had to be paid to wait.

- In the villages that were adopted, the adopters appeared to make most of the decisions for the community. This encourages feelings of helplessness on the one hand and discourages responsible citizenship, community organizing and community-based governance on the other.
- Women not included in disaster and rehabilitation
- Engineering supervision inadequate. Engineers came to the villages only twice a week, the information they gave about building earthquake safe houses was insufficient, and in some instances, they appeared to be recommending more expensive solutions than necessary.

LOOKING FORWARD

WOMEN'S RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THEMSELVES

- Strengthen and create savings and credit groups, as they are essential
- Work with government to disseminate rehabilitation information
- Use their savings and credit group to leverage demands for 50% representation on village governing committees.
- Create village committees to accompany government surveyors during their post-disaster appraisals. This would reduce errors in payments and curtail frustration in the village
- Create follow-up survey committees to hear complaints and document progress.
- Document the resources that women invest in the building projects – including their own labor.

WOMEN'S RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE GOVERNMENT

- Government should insist on the active partnership with a community-based organization in rehabilitation situations.
- Provide clear, easily available information on government programs and entitlements. Explicitly define what the government can and cannot do.
- Develop incentive programs to villages for strengthening quality of community health, education, sanitation, water, environment, and economics.
- Shift resources to support community management of rehabilitation projects.
- Develop systems for conflict resolution and redress of grievances systems: e.g., fair hearings, arbitration, and mediation.
- Develop licensing procedures for professionals.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Drawing on the observations and recommendations of the grassroots women who participated in the Gujarat Disaster Watch and Earthquake, the Huairou Commission recommends

- *that communities in disaster prone areas establish active groups to plan and promote their own development. Women must be fully represented in these groups.*
- *That these community groups begin to develop a set of partnership codes with NGOs, government and other organizations which outline their responsibilities in disaster mitigation.*
- *That governments require communities to authorize local committees to represent them in disaster mitigation and response.*