

Lessons from the Turkish Experience

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During relief, recovery and reconstruction, women are often seen as victims who can do little to change the ways in which things are done. The experiences of the Turkish women's groups show that women are not just victims but can actively influence the recovery processes in their communities.

Here are all the roles that women have undertaken in rebuilding the lives of their families and communities

- **Rebuilding Community Networks**

Most of the resources for post-disaster recovery and reconstruction go towards rebuilding housing and physical infrastructure. Little attention is paid to the rebuilding community and neighborhood networks which are the means by which women organize their activities. Many care-giving activities are organized through informal community networks. Childcare is one such activity. When neighbors and families are dispersed because of disasters, childcare systems are severely disrupted. Women have played a crucial role in rebuilding these networks.

- **Women-owned Space Nurture Community Networks**

In order to organize collectively, women need a place to gather in. In the case of the Turkish women it was the women's tents in the relief stage and subsequently the women and children's centers. Women derive tremendous strength and support from being in these spaces with other women. This is why the Turkish women were certain that they wanted to convey that their "centers helped to rebuild our lives." It's clear that the Bam women are beginning to articulate the same sentiment in relation to the Ashiane tent. The Ashiane tent in Bam every day, the tent obviously means more to them a place where they can learn about income generation. As Fatimeh pointed out, " Even if husbands get jobs women will still come to the tent, we like it here."

- **Accessing and Disseminating Public Information**
- Disasters throw information systems into disarray

Efficient, dependable communications and information dissemination strengthens the ability of communities to access entitlements and to demand greater accountability from the government. The Turkish women's experiences demonstrate that a network of women's groups can play an effective role in gathering, analyzing and disseminating information on government entitlements for disaster hit communities.

- **Influencing, Recovery, Transforming Development**

The organizations and processes that women collectively create to influence the post-disaster recovery process don't just influence the ways in disaster recovery processes but also change the way people do business-as-usual. I.e. When policymakers, governments and local authorities see the ways in which women's collectives can partner in the recovery processes, they are usually ready to work with them on

Women in the Ashiane tent said that they had gained a lot of confidence and inspiration as well as knowledge from the Turkish women's experience.

The Turkish women found that that in articulating their experiences, they had evolved into a well orchestrated training team.