

# Women's Views from the Frontline

***“A gender perspective should be integrated into all disaster risk management policies, plans and decision making processes, including those related to risk assessment, early warning, information management, and education and training.”***

**Hyogo Framework for Action 2005 – 2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters**



Women in Tamil Nadu assess needs and priorities of local communities

The Huairou Commission initiated the action-research ‘Women’s Views from the Frontline’ to compliment ‘Views from the Frontlines’ to ensure that the voices of grassroots women are included in the civil society assessment of the local implementation of the Hyogo Framework of Action and to draw attention to grassroots women as key stakeholders in the effective implementation of the HFA.

The action research engaged 23 grassroots women focused organizations in disaster prone communities from 13 countries, part of the Huairou Commission’s Global Campaign on Community Resilience, in Latin America, the Caribbean, Asia, Africa and the MENA region. A total of 1181 local stakeholders were consulted and 733 questionnaires were answered,

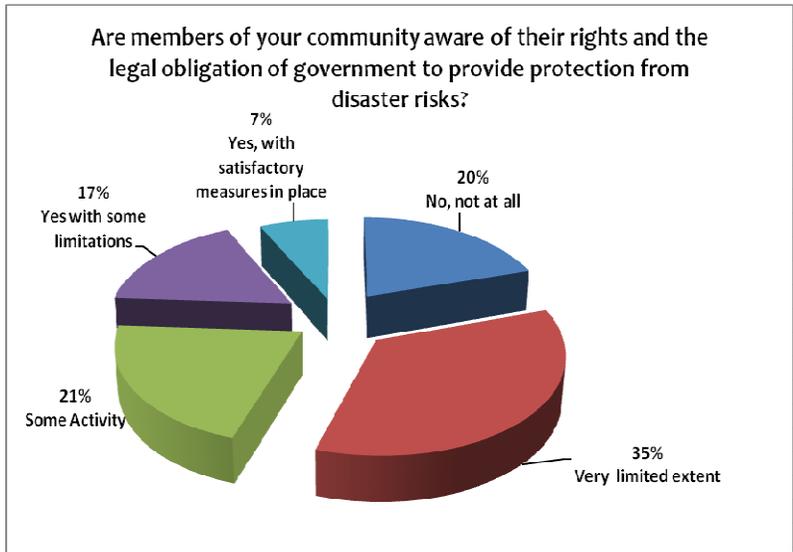
through which respondents assessed their own performance, on a series of indicators designed to measure progress on the implementation of HFA. Huairou member groups designed the action- research as an opportunity to educate a large constituency of grassroots women on HFA and how they could utilize this policy tool to advance grassroots women’s efforts to reduce community vulnerability to disaster.

A commitment to integrating a gender perspective in the implementation of HFA means ensuring that DRR programs are responsive to the needs and priorities of grassroots women living and working in disaster-prone communities. Huairou Commission members’ experience shows that women’s ability to participate in decision making processes, interface with government institutions and access and control resources are key to shaping effective disaster risk reduction processes. We have therefore selected *Right to Participation, Financial Resources, Community Participation and Information, Actual and Fair Participation* as key indicators that represent critical enabling factors for grassroots women’s participation in the local implementation of the HFA.

**23 Grassroots Women Organizations**  
**13 Countries**  
**1181 local stakeholders consulted...**

<sup>1</sup> This action research supported by the Global Network of Civil Society Organizations for Disaster Reduction

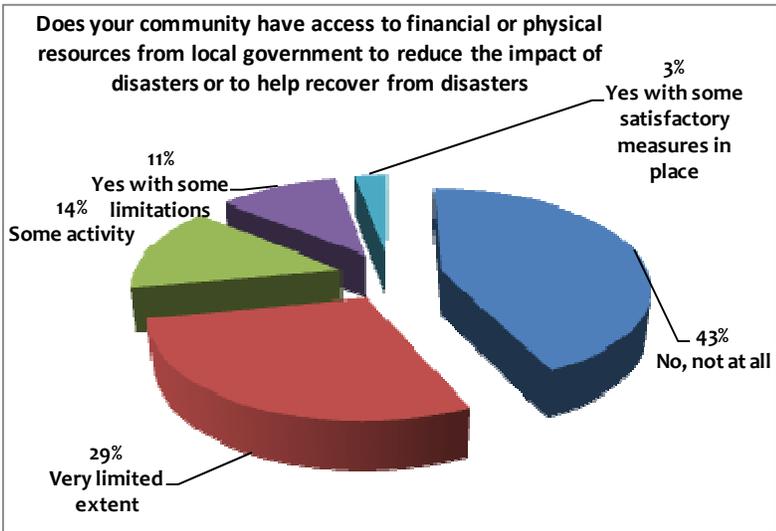




**Awareness of Rights and Entitlements<sup>2</sup>**

55% of the respondents said they either had **no awareness or very limited knowledge** of their rights, entitlements and responsibilities with regard to disaster risk management programs in their countries.

It is clear that national governments and grassroots groups both have their own initiatives underway. However both sets of initiatives are disconnected from each other. Thus **there is a need for mechanisms that connect grassroots initiatives to national programs.**



**Awareness of Financial Resources**

72% of the respondents stated that they had **very limited or no access to financial resources at the local level** to address disaster risk.

**Community Participation:** This indicator measures the extent to which women are involved in public decision making processes at the community level. As grassroots women’s organizations focused on increasing their voices in decision making and agenda setting, this indicator is particularly important for respondents. Exclusion from community participation also impacts women’s ability to dialogue and influence local government.

- 15% of total women community representatives stated that they had satisfactory, sustained support to participate in community decision making.

<sup>2</sup> NB: Only Community Representatives responses are being analyzed here



## FINDINGS

The focus group discussion and consultations undertaken during the action research, along with HC's ongoing project and documentation work worldwide, provides ample evidence that the grassroots women leaders from the 23 organizations engaged in the study are actively engaged in disaster risk reduction preparing for emergency response and greater accountability from local and national governments. Participants reported that women are: monitoring and improving access to basic services, negotiating for safe & secure housing, connecting families and communities to government entitlements and poverty reduction programs, and pioneering sustainable livelihoods and natural resource management approaches. Despite this, grassroots women have assessed their performance in DRR as being poor and noted their distance from DRR information, planning, implementation and evaluation activities leading us to conclude the following:

### **1. Women report they are excluded from emergency preparedness and response programs**

Although the largest and most well resourced elements of risk reduction are typically emergency preparedness and response, grassroots women responded they have not been included in these programs.

### **2. Information gaps between national programs and grassroots women organizations exist**

While governments have reported that they have comprehensive DM programs, women consistently stated that they were not aware of disaster management programs at the national level, nor did they understand what resources or entitlements were available through their government programs.

### **3. DRR stakeholders lack a shared definition of effective risk reduction in poor, vulnerable communities.**

Despite grassroots women's documented role in promoting food and asset security and reducing family and community vulnerabilities to shocks and crises, grassroots women assessed their performance in local DRR as poor in Women's Views from the Frontline. In comparison to government and civil society rankings in the larger VFL study, women gave themselves the lowest scores of any stakeholder group.

These findings suggest that information and power holders in risk reduction define effectiveness differently from leaders of grassroots women's groups who face insecurity and vulnerability in their daily lives. This lack of a shared perspective and definition marginalizes women and prevents women from claiming their own contributions to the DRR.

### **4. Organized constituencies of women with pro poor DRR practices represent untapped potential**

Organized groups and networks of grassroots women represent large constituencies of women who have resilience practices and knowledge which can be mobilized to advance the local implementation HFA. At present, national and state level risk reduction programs lack mechanisms (and mandates) for linking grassroots women's local networks and initiatives to their programming.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**Establish principles and standards of accountability and engagement with poor communities with women**, to enable them to participate as citizens, rather than beneficiaries, in shaping DRR policies and programs.

**Resource initiatives of grassroots women's organizations** to enable them to experiment with innovative solutions that draw upon their knowledge and practices. Initiatives could build on grassroots women's micro-credit systems, food security, safe construction and livelihoods strategies and efforts to improve access to basic services and infrastructure.

**Publicly recognize grassroots women's contribution to DRR and engage them as trainers and advisors** who can scale up effective practice and bring their development strategies on organizing communities to upgrade infrastructure, basic services, housing and

### **Asian Women Bring DRR, Information and Actions to their Governments**

In Nepal which is among the top 20 countries most vulnerable to disaster, Huairou Commission member, Lumanti Support Group for Shelter decided to survey grassroots women leaders, government and municipal officers. In the course of the action-research Lumanti found that there was low awareness of HFA within and outside the government. When the organization reported this to the Disaster Section of the Ministry of Home Affairs, the officer in charge responded with a decision to jointly organize a training workshop to orient national and municipal officials on the National Implementation Strategy for the Implementation of HFA. By the end of the workshop there was an agreement that Lumanti would support community led disaster risk mapping process in 10 wards across 5 municipalities in collaboration with local authorities, with the support of the National Government.

NGO Swayam Shikshan Prayog Tamil Nadu with organizations Covenant Centre for Development (CCD) and Rural Organization for Social and Economic Development (ROSE) led the HFA in collaboration with women's federations and self help group leaders. A total of 117 disaster prone communities in 6 districts of Tamil Nadu were involved in this survey. Women also approached local government officials to assess their level of engagement in protecting communities from disasters and in the implementation of the HFA.



livelihoods into mainstream to reduce the vulnerability of poor communities to natural disasters.

## HUIAROU COMMISSION

Founded at the Beijing Women's Conference in 1995, the Huairou Commission (HC) is a coalition of seven women's networks (national, regional and international) and professional development workers committed to partnering with grassroots women leaders and organizations to develop their communities and improve their living conditions with the support of institutions focused on poverty alleviation, sustainable development and gender equality. Working with stakeholders in academia, local and national governments and multi-lateral agencies, the HC works on thematic campaign initiatives that generate resources and platforms for grassroots women's

organizations to use to advance and formalize their leadership in development and governance activities (local to global). In cooperation with its member network GROOTS International, the Huairou Commission's Global Campaign on Community Resilience emerged from the priorities of women's groups in disaster struck communities in India, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Turkey, Honduras, Nicaragua, Jamaica and Peru who saw the urgent need to position women as leaders in decision making roles in post-disaster relief, recovery and reconstruction, so that they could sustain their participation in long term development. Currently the Community Resilience Campaign features a range of regional initiatives to develop community trainers, and women led disaster risk reduction projects endorsed by national and regional governing institutions in LAC and Asia. At the 2009 UNISDR Global Platforms on DRR meeting, HC members will focus on raising funds and institutional support for a global **Community Disaster Resilience Fund** that will enable women's groups to participate equally and effectively in pro-poor DRR and redress the gaps and inequalities noted in the Views from the Frontline research.

## PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS FROM THE HUIAROU COMMISSION

Bolivia: Centro de Mujeres Candelarias/ Fundacion Apachita,  
Brazil: Rede Pintadas,  
Honduras: Comité de Emergencia Garifuna,  
Jamaica: Construction Resource and Development Center,  
Peru: CONAMOVIDI, Servicios Educativos El Augustino, Central de Bancos Comunales, De El Agustin and  
Sta. Anita, Mujeres Unidas Para Un Pueblo Mejor,  
SE. Asia, Philippines: Lihok Pilipina/ Bantay Banay, DAMPA- Damayan ng mga Pilipinong Api, PHLSSA Partnership of Agency,  
S. Asia, Bangladesh: Participatory Development Action Program.  
India: Rural Organization for Social Education , Covenant Center for Development , Swayam Shikshan Prayog,  
Nepal: Lumanti Support Group for Shelter, Himawanti Nepal,  
Sri Lanka: Sevanatha Urban Resource Center,  
C. Asia /EU, Turkey: Foundation for the Support of Women's Work  
Africa, Cameroon: Ntankah Village Women's Common Initiative

For more information on Huairou Commission's Global Campaign on Community Resilience please contact Suranjana Gupta [suranjanagroots@aol.com](mailto:suranjanagroots@aol.com) or Prema Gopalan [premagab@gmail.com](mailto:premagab@gmail.com)  
Access to the full report on Women's Views From the Frontline can be found on Huairou Commission's website. For more information please contact Suranjana Gupta [suranjanagroots@aol.com](mailto:suranjanagroots@aol.com) or Nipin Gangadharan [gnipin@gmail.com](mailto:gnipin@gmail.com)



A series of community resilience practices: community mapping in Guatemala, a transect walk in Honduras and making bricks in Peru to build safe and resilient houses in disaster prone communities.

