

EMPOWERING GRASSROOTS WOMEN TO BUILD RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

ASIAN GRASSROOTS WOMEN'S ACADEMY

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Cebu City, Philippines

Huirou Commission
with
Lihok Pilipina and the Cebu City Government



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Executive Summary

The Hyogo Framework for Action identifies community participation and gender perspectives as cross cutting issues that must be addressed in all five priority areas of action to build resilient nations and communities. Yet, links between disaster-prone communities and policymakers remain tenuous. Despite repeatedly demonstrating their abilities as problem solvers in the context of disasters, grassroots women are often regarded as victims and beneficiaries rather than stakeholders, and as such, marginalized from planning and the agenda-setting processes. Thus the innovations, capacities and priorities of grassroots women that could increase the effectiveness of recovery and resilience programs are disconnected from planning and policymaking. The increase in both magnitude and frequency of disasters in the Asian region creates an urgent need for grassroots women's organizations and community based groups most affected by these events to engage governments and to scale up and strengthen community resilience practices while upstreaming knowledge and insights emerging from community experiences.

Stemming from this need, to create an enabling environment for community and women's groups to effectively scale up disaster risk reduction initiatives, the Huairou Commission, in partnership with member organization Lihok Pilipina and the Cebu City Government organized a six-day Asian Grassroots Women's Academy on Resilience in October 2008, bringing together 85 participants - primarily grassroots leaders - to share and analyse their practices; evolve a common framework on resilience; and explore the creation of regional grassroots platforms to upstream locally led resilience initiatives. Asian participants at the Academy came from Cambodia, Indonesia, Philippines, South Korea Thailand, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka. In addition, Huairou representatives from Kenya, Uganda, Nicaragua, Honduras, Netherlands, Canada and the USA also attended. The Academy was financially supported by the Huairou Commission, GROOTS International, American Jewish World Service, CORDAID, ProVention, UNDP, UNIFEM East and South East Asia and Global Network of Civil Society Organizations for Disaster Reduction. In addition, Lihok Pilipina reached out to several national and local level partners to support the Academy, such as, the City Government and Provincial Governments of Cebu, Zonta Clubs 1 and 2, Kaabag Sa Sugbo, the Office of Professor Etemadi from the University of Philippines, responsible for the documentation of this event, and the Partnership of Philippine Support Services Agencies (PHILSSA), who supported in-country travel.

A process of pre-organizing and preparation was undertaken in the months preceding the Academy. Senior activist, Fides Bagasao (executive committee member of the Huairou Commission) from the Local and Organizers of Community Organizations (LOCOA) played a key role to reach out to Asian LOCOA partners to locate grassroots leaders and other organizations interested in supporting grassroots groups to address resilience. An Asian stakeholder group comprising of Fides Bagasao LOCOA, Tessie Fernandez from Lihok Pilipina, Philippines, Quazi Baby from PDAP Bangladesh, Lajana Manandhar from Lumanti Support Group for Shelter, Nepal, Dian Tri Irawaty from Urban Poor Links, Indonesia, Prema Gopalan from SSP, and Suranjana Gupta from the Huairou Commission communicated on monthly conference calls to shape the agenda, reach out to participants and identify resources for the Academy. In August 2008, a preparatory meeting was held in Cebu City where Tessie Fernandez, Fides Bagasao, Dick Balderrama and Suranjana Gupta met to plan the Academy. This also provided an opportunity for the Huairou staff-person to visit communities in which Academy participants Co-Multiversity and DAMPA were organizing grassroots women.

In January 2005, 168 Governments adopted a 10-year plan to make the world safer from natural hazards at the [World Conference on Disaster Reduction](#), held in Kobe, Hyogo, Japan. The [Hyogo Framework for Action \(HFA\)](#) is a global blueprint for disaster risk reduction efforts during the next decade. Its goal is to substantially reduce disaster losses by 2015, in lives, and in the social, economic, and environmental assets of communities and countries.

PURPOSE OF THE ACADEMY

The purpose of the Academy was to:

- Enable participants to appreciate the importance of disaster risk reduction and resilience strategies;
- Provide a space for sharing and analyzing grassroots women's practices;
- Introduce community risk mapping as a collective planning tool for an analysis of local vulnerabilities and community capacities;
- Link grassroots women's to one another to facilitate the creation of networks in order to collectively advance resilience building efforts in the region and enable participants to build safer, more resilient communities. Recognize the importance of multi-stakeholder relationships to mainstream locally led DRR strategies



MAIN OUTCOMES OF THE ACADEMY

Participants not only understood analyzed disaster responses, but affirmed the importance of proactively initiating resilience building practices that reduce community vulnerabilities and protect communities from the impact of disasters.

The range of experiences and practices shared, in conjunction with the introduction of community and capacity vulnerabilities helped participants evolve a shared understanding of resilience in a grassroots friendly framework. This framework allowed participants to understand that while previously they might have been unfamiliar with the term 'resilience,' in fact, their priorities and practices in disaster recovery, response and in poverty reduction do contribute to building resilient communities.

Partner dialogue with a distinguished set of panellists spanning representatives of local authorities, police force, academics and regional and global agencies suggested that resources are available at local and global levels to advance grassroots women's resilience building efforts. However the challenge before grassroots women is to develop mechanisms for dialogue and collaboration in order to access and utilize these resources.

Follow up plans from the Academy included the following:

a. Developing regional grassroots women's platforms in the region:



- South East Asian organizations agreed to communicate regularly through an e-group and a newsletter from the region run from the Philippines. Priorities in this region include: focusing on land and housing issues, basic services and understanding more about climate change, as well as, creating greater visibility for community and women's priorities at national, regional and global levels. In addition, they also want to mobilize their advocacy and lobbying strategies for secure tenure to the South Asians were interested in holding National Academies in Nepal and Afghanistan to bring together grassroots women's groups nationally to work on disaster. They also wanted to undertake action based research to spearhead an innovative approach

for grassroots women's participation in disaster resilience. The South Asians were interested in mapping grassroots women's groups, working on resilience in the region and planning a series of activities that would lead up to an Academy and advocacy workshop in Sri Lanka by the end of 2009.

- Both South Asia and South East Asia identified focal point persons who would take responsibility for regularly communicating their organizations' activities to others in the region.

b. Assessing the Implementation of HFA

- Several organizations present at the Academy agreed to undertake action research to assess the local implementation of the HFA. They saw this survey as an opportunity to better understand resilience and reach out to local and national governments to find out about resilience building programs, and to explore collaborative opportunities between government and grassroots community groups.
- Findings from the community surveys will contribute to a global report providing a civil society report on the implementation of the HFA. This report called 'Views from the Frontline' will be prepared by the Global Network of Civil Society Organizations on Disaster Reduction and launched at the Second Global Platform on Disaster Risk Reduction in Geneva in June 2009.

c. Key messages identified for forthcoming policy venues including WUF

- Women should be seen as initiators, authorities, and transfer agents of resilient development and thus included in decision making processes. Grassroots organizations must drive the demand for locally led DRR because without their efforts global and national programs will not reach local disaster-prone communities, nor address the needs and priorities of the communities.
- Grassroots women's efforts in the context of poverty reduction, disaster and development are key to building resilient communities.
- Participants should identify mechanisms for supporting the development of national and regional grassroots women's platforms and learning networks emerging in South Asia and South East Asia.
- Partnerships with local and regional stakeholders should be created to mainstream effective locally led DRR, including at the local government level new programming and budgets that are inclusive of these strategies.

ACADEMY THEMES

The Academy process was divided into 6 major thematic areas with each day focusing primarily on one theme.

I. Learning from disaster response and community development experiences

The practice sharing sessions had participants from Indonesia, Sri Lanka and India sharing their post-tsunami relief and recovery experiences. Following these presentations, organizations from the Philippines highlighted efforts of communities to organize themselves around disaster response as well as reduce vulnerabilities linked to insecure housing and tenure through their community development efforts. Common themes across all the experiences showed that when women and communities were excluded from relief and recovery programs this led to wasted resources, corruption and dependency. Across the region, grassroots women had organized themselves to influence programs - ensuring fair distribution of aid; improving access to basic services; and influencing decision-making processes. A key insight included the fact that when women are well organized they are better able to negotiate with government and NGOs for resources and more responsive programs. Another common challenge for



communities from tsunami-affected countries was that coastal communities were being evicted from coastal areas because of zoning regulations after the tsunami.

The practice sharing was followed by a discussion in which women analyzed the problems they experienced as a result of disaster and the range of solutions that they had developed to address these problems. The problems included damage or loss of housing, loss of livelihoods, lack of basic services and infrastructure, and health problems as a result of water contamination. The inventory of grassroots women's initiatives to address these challenges covered a wide spectrum that left them better equipped to advance development priorities and to cope with disasters in the future. Practices included forming savings and credit groups to provide financial support for restoring livelihoods, restoring agriculture to ensure livelihoods and food security, de-clogging drains to prevent flooding, negotiating with government to access entitlements, secure housing and to improve access to basic services.

It was evident from the disaster response experiences from the three tsunami-hit countries that the disaster response process had opened up opportunities for grassroots women to enter into the public arena for the first time and address community vulnerabilities such as insecure housing and evictions. In addition to improving housing, food security, livelihoods, basic services and infrastructure, organizing women's groups to collectively negotiate with decision makers were also seen as key components of the solutions that participants shared.

II. Community risk mapping



Participants visited five communities around Cebu City to find out what the exposed risks were of these communities, and how community members organized themselves to mobilize their own resources and capacities to prevent damage and losses in their communities. The strengths or strategies for building resilience ranged from organizing emergency response teams to improving infrastructure by negotiating with government. Here the idea, that strengths, resources and capacities are linked to resilience building activities, was introduced, along with the suggestion that weaknesses and problems in the community represented risks and vulnerabilities. Participants from Nepal, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Philippines, Uganda and India also shared different ways in which their communities had used mapping to advance community development or reduce disaster risk.

III. Building a shared understanding of resilience

Drawing on the experiences and practices presented, Huairou Commission staff persons presented an analytical framework on resilience linking grassroots women's practices to resilience building, in terms of protecting lives, homes, livelihoods and preventing deaths and damage to the families and communities. The framework used participants' practices as a baseline to illustrate community vulnerabilities and resilience practices. Evident from this discussion was that all resilience practices had 3 elements in common - an organizing and mobilizing component; a technical component or knowledge consolidation and transfer component; and an advocacy component to lift up and strengthen these activities to create responsive, accountable institutional arrangements. The session also sought to link resilience to poverty reduction, development and governance in order to highlight that an integrated rather than a compartmentalized approach is needed to enhance the resilience of disaster-prone communities.

IV. Partner dialogue

The following session involved a panel of partners from the Philippines that included, City Government, Police force, UNDP, UNHabitat, CAPWIP. Each of the speakers in the panel acknowledged grassroots contributions to building resilient communities and also presented opportunities for grassroots women to add input into the design and planning processes within their institutions. This was illustrated when the City Government explained that they had *unutilized* funds for disaster risk reduction that grassroots women could access if they were able to develop the right mechanisms for accessing and using these funds. The UNHabitat representative spoke of its gender-mainstreaming program that participants should reach out to gender programs in their UN country offices to advocate for the formal mandates and resources for grassroots women's roles in disaster resilience. The representative from UNDP's Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery stated her interest in collaborating with Huairou Commission and its grassroots members to develop a practical framework on resilience that is not only relevant to grassroots women, but incorporates broader learnings from the community perspective. She also reiterated her commitment to developing programs that would invest in empowering grassroots women to address their resilience needs and priorities.

V. Introduction to the Hyogo Framework of Action

Most participants were not familiar with this policy framework. The five priorities for action as well as the cross cutting principles were introduced by the Huairou Commission, and participants were given an opportunity to participate in a global action-research study, which the Huairou Commission is undertaking in partnership with the Global Network on Civil Society Organizations on Disaster Reduction. This action-research aims to complement the official Global Assessment Report on the implementation of HFA being undertaken by UNISDR with national governments on the implementation of the HFA. Huairou Commission's participation seeks to ensure that grassroots women's voices are included in civil society's assessment of the implementation of the HFA. As such, several participants present at the Academy agreed to participate in this action-research, seeing it as an opportunity to introduce HFA to their communities and reach out to local and national governments to identify opportunities for collaborating on resilience building.

VI. The Way Forward

The final sessions were used to draft a 'Cebu Framework of Action' that emphasized the role of grassroots women as key actors in disaster reduction.

The main focus of this session was to illustrate the benefits of developing national and regional networks of grassroots women that could increase the impact, influence and visibility of their local efforts. Several participants who had developed local, national and regional networks presented the benefits and the challenges involved in building grassroots networks across different political views and cultures. Honduras and Nicaragua talked about the regional networking in Latin America and the Caribbean which helped them to transfer resilience building practices in Central America as well as jointly advocate through regional bodies for greater national and local recognition for their work. Ugandan and Kenyan participants talked about the Home Based Caregivers Network they had developed to link grassroots home based caregivers first within their countries and then across African countries. These national and regional networks were not only a major source of support for grassroots women taking care of HIV/AIDS affected communities, but also enhanced the recognition for caregivers' work nationally, regionally and globally.

In the final session of the Academy South Asians and Southeast Asians worked in two different groups to create a regional plan on advancing grassroots women's work on resilience in their countries and regions.

The Huairou Commission

COALITION OF GRASSROOTS NETWORKS AND PARTNERS ADDRESSING WOMEN AND SETTLEMENTS

Founded at the Beijing Women's Conference in 1995, the Huairou Commission is a coalition of grassroots women's networks and professional partners addressing women's and settlements concerns. Comprised of seven national, regional and global networks, the Huairou Commission seeks to advance poor women's priorities through building partnerships between community based organizations and other development actors including NGOs, academia, local and national governments, and multilateral agencies to generate resources and platforms to influence policy and programming for poor women. Grassroots women's capacities and advocacy agendas are advanced through thematic global campaigns that highlight grassroots women's priorities and contribution to secure housing and land tenure; good governance; home-based care-giving for HIV/AIDS affected communities and community resilience.

For more information on Huairou Commission's Campaigns, please visit www.huairou.org

GRASSROOTS WOMEN'S ACADEMIES: A METHODOLOGY FOR ORGANIZING, LEARNING AND AGENDA-SETTING

The Huairou Commission has a strong commitment to evolving methodologies that enable grassroots women leaders to leverage their experience, knowledge and organized constituencies to influence planning and policymaking. Over the last 8 years, the Grassroots Women's Academies have evolved as an effective peer learning forum enabling grassroots leaders to analyze and transfer practices, build networks and evolve advocacy agendas which grassroots leaders can bring to local, national, regional and global policy venues. The Academy addresses the challenge of mainstreaming grassroots women's priorities and perspectives. It not only brings together women leaders from poor communities, but also supports them to engage with other problem solvers like themselves so that they can consolidate their knowledge, transfer their practices and identify a set of advocacy priorities that they can bring to national, regional and global policy venues. The Grassroots Women's Academies directly contradict the dominant trend in capacity building programs in which grassroots women are positioned solely as learners and recipients of training. By drawing on the extensive knowledge and practices of grassroots women leaders and creating opportunities for collective agenda-setting and transfer of practices, the Academies position grassroots women as peer trainers and resource persons, thus supporting their leadership and legitimizing their knowledge, in addition to being a powerful tool for transferring lessons and practices across grassroots innovators.

HUAIROU COMMISSION'S GLOBAL CAMPAIGN ON COMMUNITY RESILIENCE



The Global Campaign on Community Resilience was developed in response to the efforts of core members in India, Turkey, Honduras, Peru and Jamaica to position grassroots women as leaders in public decision making roles in post-disaster relief, recovery and reconstruction, such that they could sustain their participation in long-term development processes. Since then the resilience program has evolved to develop grassroots women's strategies to reduce the impact of disasters, and has also expanded to include other Asian and Latin American groups. The Huairou Commission has focused on linking groups within and across countries to create platforms for learning and advocacy to highlight the contributions of grassroots women and advocate for policies

and programs that recognize and legitimize these contributions.

The Huairou Commission's Global Campaign on Community Resilience is led by GROOTS International and is currently implementing the following activities to advance the resilience building agendas of members in Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean:

Global Community Trainers Initiative

This unique global initiative led by Huairou Commissions. member network GROOTS International, supports grassroots women leaders to systematize their knowledge and practices in order to transfer and scale up these practices. Within the first year this initiative, it was implemented in India, Turkey, Indonesia Honduras, Peru, and Jamaica and has created over 150 trainers.

Piloting a Community Disaster Resilience Fund in Partnership with ProVention Consortium

At the First Global Platform on DRR convened by UNISDR in June 2007 Huairou Commission, GROOTS International and ProVention Consortium organized a workshop called "From National Frameworks to Local Action." A key recommendation emerging from the workshop called for a community disaster fund that brings local priorities and capacities of disaster prone communities to DRR programming. This Community Disaster Resilience Fund was formally launched in India by the National Disaster Management Authority of India with ProVention at the Plenary Session of the Second Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction held on November, 2007 in New Delhi. A series of community and grassroots women-driven demonstration projects are being launched in India to enable communities to drive local, national and regional policy and program agendas.

Action- Research on Grassroots women's perspective on implementation of HFA

The Huairou Commission is a founding member of the Global Network of Civil Society Organizations on Disaster Reduction. This Network is currently undertaking an action-research called 'Views from the Frontline' to draw attention to civil society concerns in relation to the implementation of the Hyogo Framework of Action. The Huairou Commission used the Asian Grassroots Academy to introduce the concept of resilience and the Hyogo Framework of Action and then to present the global action -research as an opportunity for organized grassroots women's organizations to assess the local implementation of the HFA. Huairou Commission's participation in this global action -research is expected to highlight grassroots women's priorities and concerns to bring these findings into the 'Views from the Frontline' report, which will be launched at the UNISDR's Second Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction in 2009.

Up-streaming Lessons Learned from Grassroots Practice with the Support of UNDP

GROOTS International is also supported by a grant from UNDP's Gender Team at the Bureau of Development Policy to transfer effective women-led resilience practices and harvest lessons emerging from grassroots practices in the form of case studies and tools. A key component of this project is a practitioner-policy dialogue that will bring grassroots practitioners together with policy makers to discuss the policy and program implications emerging from grassroots practices and to identify strategies for scaling up and mainstreaming effective resilience practices that integrate disaster risk reduction with poverty reduction and women's empowerment.