

Grassroots Women's Leadership: Disaster to Development



Foundation for the Support of Women's Work (FSWW)

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Marmara Earthquake (1999)

- 90% of Turkey under seismic risk
- Dense urban + industrial region
- >18,000 lives, 48,000 injured and 200,000 left homeless
- Economic damage:
 - \$5 - 6.5 billion
- Existing disaster plan proved useless in addressing the crisis





About FSWW

- Non-profit organization founded in 1986
 - Mission: to support grassroots women's leadership throughout Turkey in improving the quality of their lives and of their communities
 - Participatory approach based on local resources and partnerships
 - Works with 20 grassroots women's groups in Istanbul, the earthquake region, and southeastern Turkey
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Strategies

- Create public spaces for women and their children
 - Provide capacity building for empowerment and support grassroots initiatives
 - Create processes for dialogue and negotiation to build strategic partnerships
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Public Spaces: Women and Children Centers

- 9 centers under women's cooperative management

Outreach:

- Over 10,000 women and children

Activities:

- Early child care and education
- Information sharing and organizing
- Livelihoods
- Advocacy



Women's Initiatives for Empowerment

- Assist rescue teams and provide trauma relief
- Conduct Community surveys
- Monitor aid & government programs
- Provide community services
- Expand Livelihood options
- Savings and credit
- Advocacy for priority concerns
- Access resources for their initiatives
- Legal organizations, cooperatives,



Grassroots Women's Initiatives for Strategic Partnerships

- Multi sector workshops
- Forging linkages with officials
- Community information meetings
- Contracts with municipalities and government
- Representation at formal platforms.



Outcomes

1. Grassroots women's organizations with assets, emerged out of informal groups.
2. Women mobilized for sustainable economic initiatives, with access to different forms of credit (app. 2000 women)
3. Expanded community services by women.
4. Women's public leadership recognized and strengthened:
 - public resource allocation
 - participation in the formal partnership bodies
5. Women in local governance advocating for priorities and with ~~stronger roles in the family and community.~~

Challenges and Opportunities

- Communities/women are seen as “victims” with no capacity to rebuild their lives.
 - Use of resources at relief phase, no processes for sustainable solutions and long term investments.
 - Entitlement policy targeting only asset-owners, ignoring the damage for all in communities.
 - Collapse of government functions opened up space.
 - Disaster: Socially legitimate reasons for women to enter in to public sphere and more visibility for their coping mechanisms.
 - By nature, disaster response requires partnerships.
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