

SUMMARY REPORT

Rapid Gender Needs Assessment of flood affected communities



Courtesy: Asad Zaidi

Objective

The RGA aims at a rapid gender assessment of the humanitarian crisis and the initial response

Communications

Concern: People did not have information on flood warnings, or know how of disaster risk reduction, safeguards or immediate steps to take in emergencies. Men and women had differential access to means of communication, and there were significant inter-provincial variations, underscoring that uniform approaches for outreach are not viable.

Exacerbating structural factors: Women's low mobility, exposure and interaction, and low literacy levels.

Gaps to be addressed: Different mechanisms need to be designed, using existing community networks, health workers and other means such as group gatherings.

Evacuation

Concern: Disaster management plans at district levels did not operate smoothly, the international humanitarian community stayed out of evacuation and availability of transportation was not factored in.

Exacerbating structural factors: Low levels of coordination between different arms of state and lack of local government structures have added to the stress. Additionally, the communication and transportation infrastructure had been weak to begin with, and rendered ineffective in the crisis. Women were unfamiliar with negotiating public transportation.

Gaps to be addressed: Evacuation plans must include orderly transportation, free of cost or subsidized, that ensures families are kept in tact and preferential treatment is given to vulnerable people within communities.

Forms of shelter

Concern: Shelters range from camps to schools, spontaneous settlements, on site of damaged houses or host families. Access to shelter or privacy is still uneven and nation-wide Needs Assessment has still not been conducted. The humanitarian community has been unable to anticipate issues like premises for livestock. The decision to relocate was primarily taken by male heads of households and people's actions are dictated not only by disaster-related rationale but by longer term coping strategies.

Exacerbating structural factors: There was low disaster preparedness in communities, compounded by poor infrastructure and communication networks. External actors have not yet developed a deep contextual understanding. The trust deficit in the state citizen relationship and distrust and conflict with other communities are significant barriers.

Gaps to be addressed: Tailored approaches are required to strengthen women's positive coping mechanisms and ensure their participation in planning, executing relief and early recovery interventions. Women's concerns need to be factored in accordance with location and form of shelter. Immediate provision of shelters or materials with which people can construct temporary shelters are required. Gender stereotypes should not be reinforced that allow reconstruction resources to be given only to men, and men and women should be joined custodians.

Access to distributed aid

Concern: Women were not visible in the relief corps, which may have made it easier for women in communities to access aid. There is little evidence that distribution hubs were designed to be reachable by women, whereas women had to physically compete with men to get relief goods. Men feel bound by their gender roles as providers of food and shelter to use aggressive tactics. Access to distributed aid is contingent upon visibility, such as concentration and prominence of IDPs in camps. When living in diffused groups, it is hard for them to reach centers whenever distribution occurs. People point to the demeaning distribution process with food being flung while people wrestle among themselves.

Exacerbating structural factors: Discrimination against women creates the grounds for their deprivation in crises. The non-recognition of women as household heads or economically active contributors to the household impacts the kinds of relief goods and services available to them.

Gaps to be addressed: Efforts should be made for awareness and gender sensitivity of aid volunteers and workers towards more organized distribution. A system for targeting of vulnerable populations as prioritized recipients needs to be instituted. In the longer term, advocacy for recognition of women's economic and social contribution would be important.

Food availability

Concerns: State efforts, private philanthropy and humanitarian organizations have managed to stave off extreme hunger so far, although the on ground situation is still unstable. Entire food stocks have been lost. Unless pipelines of smooth food supplies are ensured, the situation may deteriorate as some form of support dry up. The weak response by the world community in fronting financial aid for helping Pakistan cope with the crisis could lead to accelerating the food crisis as supplies run short. Access to food is highly uneven and people are coping by purchasing food on credit, borrowing food, and limiting their portion size. Women are socially conditioned to make sacrifices and refrain from claiming limited family resources.

Exacerbating structural factors: Low levels of food security preceding the crisis, as evident in the case of malnourishment of children. There was a high level of rural poverty as well as a precarious balance of many above defined poverty lines where systemic shocks would plunge them below it – the flood is a definite such shock. The local government's structure is not in place so the grass root machinery for targeting and delivery is not available.

Gaps to be addressed: Coordination is required between various actors to ensure even and regular access to food. The international community needs to step forward with firm assistance commitments. Longer term poverty alleviation and asset building programs need to factor in women and begin soon before people resort to negative and harmful coping mechanisms.

WASH

Concern: The inadequacy of latrines and bathing facilities emerges as a priority concern, and as both a health issue and a dignity issue. There was no sewerage planning in camps, and women suffered under the strain of collapsing amenities and the impulse to conceal their need of private facilities owing to their notions of modesty. They wait for nightfall to access lavatories, risking both, security and ill health. Local practices often precluded familiarity with pit latrine systems and led to hazards such as uncovered excreta. Women have also been bathing in unclean water while fully dressed, as they either don't have other clothes or the privacy to

remove them. Access to clean water and soap remain a significant concern. The division of labor continues to place on women the responsibility of waste disposal, cleaning, fetching water and maintaining health of family – in this case, without any resources or means to do so.

Exacerbating structural factors: Various studies establish the low level of knowledge, attitudes and practices on WASH, and that hygiene practices are not included in school curricula and that life skills education is not prevalent. Low literacy levels complicate the situation. Pre-existing gender division of labor places the burden of WASH on women.

Gaps to be addressed: WASH must be prioritized in relief services delivery programs, to make conditions livable for affected communities and to ensure no outbreaks of disease happens. Safe practices must be reiterated through immediate awareness programs so this knowledge is carried back to regular living conditions and incorporated in life based skills. Women's stay in camps and experience in current contact zones outside their usual should be one of possibility of solidarities and connections, not one they reflect on as a period of unmitigated suffering.

General Health

Concern: Fever, diarrhea, scabies and other skin diseases and eye infections like conjunctivitis were the most common health disorders of women. Health problems were directly proportionate to stagnant water, access to clean drinking water, availability of toilet facilities and hygiene practices. So far, medical workers and volunteers have managed to prevent outbreak of diseases such as cholera, malaria and dengue fever. Tertiary health care seems to become available to most people within a few days of displacement, and most seem to have access within one hour of travel time, though it is not possible to judge the quality of health care at this point. Hospitals on the other hand are overburdened and struggle to accept referrals.

Exacerbating structural factors: Poor health baselines are evident as many women are anemic with bad records. Many serious medical conditions unrelated to the flood have been diagnosed of which women had no prior knowledge. That more than a quarter respondents in a Unifem survey reported an increase in medical assistance after the floods indicates prior low level access. The acute levels of poverty negatively impact women's access to preventive and tertiary health care and coupled with low nutritional intake chips away at bodily resistance.

Gaps to be addressed: Healthcare must respond not just to post-flood conditions but to medical trends and awareness of preventive and remedial medicine must accompany current treatments. In the longer term, it is critical to create mechanisms to monitor the access to and quality of medical assistance available for the poor, and to design health care programs and medical insurance schemes that are functional and responsive to women's needs. A major deterrent to access is lack of (or fees of) transportation, and ambulances or subsidized transportation should be factored in for ensuring women's healthcare.

Reproductive Health

Concern: Doctors, aid workers and media reports have stressed the importance of maternal healthcare. While a significant number of medical experts have been mobilized and are working in impacted communities, access remains uneven between provinces, and between villages near towns that those dispersed far and wide. The McRAM data shows that that in 10% of households surveyed, there had been one or more births in the family after the floods. A high number of women displaced by the floods were lactating, more than a quarter of whom experiences changes in lactation practices such as reduction and discontinuation, primarily because of lack of privacy and space for breastfeeding.

Exacerbating structural factors: Extremely high fertility rates were common through all sites. McRAM shows in over 80% of households surveyed, women do not practice any form of birth control. The dire consequences include high maternal mortality, already high in Pakistan. Women often do not have control over decision-making about their own bodies and reproduction. Distance remains a significant hurdle in women's access to health care. Other considerations include costs, transportation, lack of female staff and security concerns.

Gaps to be addressed: Men, women and decision-making elders need to be targeted for awareness programs underlining the importance of controlling births for well being of women, children and families. Women's current concentration in relief centers and shelters must be turned into a temporary advantage and used to give them access to information and choices. Longer term measures should include ensuring timely and quality healthcare and attitudinal change initiatives for women's bodily rights and sexual and reproductive rights.

Livelihood

Concern: Women report of losing their livelihoods entirely, whether engaged in agriculture, cottage industry or home based work. Livestock management is traditionally women's domain, so the loss of livestock and fodder crops impacts them in detrimental ways. Destruction of cotton crops has left women indebted as in anticipation of payments they earn from cotton picking many have already taken loans. Women recognized women's economic work more than men. Context-based data analysis indicates secondary sources of household income are derived primarily from women's labor. Women had less information than men about the extent of damage to their crops, and more women than men said they had limited access to information and access to functional markets. Land reclamation was the most prioritized immediate livelihood need as pointed out by both men, followed by cash for inputs. The congruity of their needs underlines the interdependence of people and communities working in agriculture.

Exacerbating structural factors: Economic models use household as the unit of analysis and calculate on that basis, where women's work is rendered invisible and so they may not be beneficiaries of livelihood or microfinance schemes. Women's work in the informal sector and in agricultural work has not gained official recognition and is not documented as workers.

Gaps to be addressed: Gender roles in agriculture should be reviewed to understand how destruction of particular crops has gendered effects. Women should receive livestock compensation and the National Commission on the Status of Women suggests handing women ownership papers as symbolic steps towards women's asset creation. In the longer term, agricultural and home-based women workers must be documented in the formal economy.

Education

Concern: Despite conflicting numbers, the widespread destruction of the schooling infrastructure is already clear. Where educational institutes have not been damaged by floods, they have been occupied as shelters for the displaced people. In either scenario, classes are disrupted, with no sense of when they can resume. There is evidence of people undertaking negative coping strategies that compromise the needs of boys and girls with reference to education, such as entering previously school going children into child labor.

Exacerbating structural factors: The low priority placed on education and already low levels of schooling compound the crisis. The data indicates that communities may give preference to rebuilding other infrastructure and schools will not urgently. It may be safe to assume that girls schools would rank even lower in importance than that of boys. Prior to the floods, the infrastructure left much to be desired, with many

schools without lavatories and boundary walls, and with even those destroyed, this may be eclipsed by what feature as more critical lifesaving needs.

Gaps to be addressed: A damage and needs assessment of the education sector is needed, as are interim arrangements for restoring normalcy in schooling routine, by providing temporary learning centers and SIB kits. Providing free and compulsory education was something Pakistan was already struggling with – it may now be critical to create further incentives such as linking longer term food aid, stipends and scholarships. Longer term attitudinal change interventions should posit education as a mode of increasing livelihood options and quality of life.

Security in camps

Concern: Camps do not have formal security mechanisms and structures, except where people have made their own watch groups. General security perceptions were consistent between men and women though feelings of insecurity were higher among women than men. There have been incidents of looting of aid and women are reluctant to try for fear of such outbreaks, and since they cannot strong-arm their way to the distribution frontline.

Exacerbating structural factors: Women are socially conditioned to feel uncertain and insecure when out of familiar environment. Both men's and women's groups identified with feeling very insecure when traveling from their area of stay. These shared experiences signal intersectionality, that, sect, class, ethnicity and clan associations also impact women.

Gaps to be addressed: While long term interventions should focus on dispute resolution and dialogue between communities to address the political economy of conflict, in the immediate term, communities should be kept as intact as possible. Targeting mechanisms instituted to provide access to vulnerable groups within camps and in off-camp sites. District officials should be vigilant on security concerns for women.

Gender based violence

Concern: Women and girls face different forms of violence from their own families and communities than they do from strangers. For women, threat perceptions are as important as incidents of violence. In the GNA, 34% of respondents said violence against women is most likely to occur within the home, whereas 33% said its likelihood was highest when traveling alone or working outside the home. This shows that public and private spaces are both potential and actual sites of violence. Disputes have already emerged in the aftermath of floods. While most have been around issues of access to relief goods, many have reportedly been over identity politics (marriage, language, ethnicity, religion). As camps have mixtures of various groups in proximity, given pre-existing ethnic tensions, the battles for limited resources could be articulated as identity conflicts. Sindh is a case in point with the highest concentration of mixed groups housed in same sites, against a backdrop of tribal rivalries and clan-based tensions. Women's bodies often become sites where disputes are mediated whether through attacks, harassment or even marriage. Analysts are already predicting forced marriages as a way of resolving non-payable debts. Women have reported cases of sexual harassment in camps where there were mixed groups. Women who traditionally maintain purdah /segregation feel exposed, vulnerable and threatened by the presence of men who are strangers.

Exacerbating structural factors: The incidence of violence against women had high baselines prior to the disaster and social acceptance of violence against women, social and in cases legal impunity for aggressors. Women's vulnerability profiles change with age, marital status, presence of informal familial social protection systems and with markers of intersections of ethnicity, language, religion and class.

Gaps to be addressed: Design systems and mechanisms to address GBV that will stay in place even after the immediacy of the disaster fades. Close monitoring will be required for emergent crimes such as forced or early marriages that may accelerate once back in opacity of homes and communities resort to negative coping mechanisms. Stranger perpetrated crimes can and should be minimized with crime watch and policing initiatives.

Mobility

Concern: Women in general have low mobility so proximity of relief goods and services, as well as destruction of routine service structures is particularly problematic for them. Even accessing aid requires a degree of mobility. Though disasters temporarily suspend usual curbs on mobility, women's perception of threat and vulnerability has remained high.

Exacerbating structural factors: Women face double jeopardy, because where they are impacted by issues specific to them as women, they also are affected along with their families as members, such as enmities with other tribes, or by other identities such as religion and sect..

Gaps to be addressed: While usual impediments to women's mobility are temporarily lessened or suspended, their presence in camps should be used to create awareness and connections with a range of practices ranging from hygiene standards to citizenship rights. It must be ascertained that relief and reconstruction efforts do not foreclose options for structural change such as increasing women's mobility.

Issues to track in Early Recovery

- Protection of women and security concerns may emerge as major concern as trends and aggressors of violence against women change with duration and phase of crisis and as people are compelled to use detrimental coping strategies
- Nuanced responses that differentiate people living in varying shelter forms and across various spatial arrangements, will have divergent vulnerabilities requiring multiple strategies
- Environmental changes may affect and limit women's life choices and could burden natural resources or changed cropping patterns that could disinvest women from relevant processes
- While lack of cultural sensitivity could trigger resentment, incremental steps towards women's empowerment could be stultified by resorting to arguments of relativism as culture is a contested concept often defined in patriarchal terms.

Limitations of data

- Women's coping mechanisms are often invisible in rapid surveys and must be substantiated through qualitative data
- Balochistan is neglected in data collection and must not be taken as an indicator of low needs basis, as it is the most backward and deprived province in the country.