

International Day for Disaster Reduction 2012

Women & Girls - The InVisible Force of Resilience



During the 3rd annual Women in the World Summit held in New York in March 2012, **US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton** said “women have the power to shape our destinies in ways previous generations couldn’t imagine.” This observation about women and girls as a force to counter many of the problems ailing the world represents an idea whose time has come, and not a minute too soon.

Haydee Rodríguez is President of the Union de Cooperativas Las Brumas in Nicaragua - an association of women's farming cooperatives in six municipalities across Jinotega State, which provides credit to women farmers and influences agricultural legislation. Rodríguez lobbies for funds for poor women to purchase agricultural land. As a woman landowner, she understands the importance of land ownership - securing land titles for women is central to women's position as agricultural producers. "If the land was in the hands of women, developing countries would not suffer from hunger. With land titles...we are able to produce", she states.

Nicky Gavron, former Deputy Mayor of London, has been at the forefront of developing land use and environmental policies for London for over two decades. She was a key figure in the establishment of the London Climate Change Agency and the Large Cities Climate Leadership Group. In 2006, Business Week Magazine named her as one of the 20 most important people in the world in the battle against greenhouse gas emissions. Gavron believes “Mitigating climate change is good for the economy, for competitiveness, for productivity and, above all, for the quality of life. We need to understand that we are the first [generation to have] the knowledge about climate change and the last to be able to do anything about it.”

Senator Loren Legarda of the Philippines advocates for disaster resilience in her country and in the South East Asia region. She received the 2011 Asian Leader Award of Excellence in environmental policy and climate change adaptation and is the author of the Philippines Climate Change Act, as well as the Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act. She is also UNISDR's Asia-Pacific Regional Champion for Disaster Risk Reduction. Her day-to-day actions to empower women in the Philippines are guided by her belief that “Women are powerful agents of change in the overall climate change adaptation and mitigation efforts. We know this and we have a track record to prove this. In fact, women have been silently and effectively at the frontlines of confronting climate change.”

Ruth Serech, the Mayan Women Coordinator for Integrated Development in Guatemala initiated a community mapping exercise, for local women to identify vulnerabilities, and disaster prevention practices. These women then agreed that planting vegetables in 'table beds' or 'hanging terraces' could be used for household consumption as well as income generation. Local women from the town of Chimaltenango developed 50 'table beds' as a pilot to ensure food security and access to familiar crops without flood risk. A task force of women has now been set up in 30 communities in San Juan Comalapa, and many women mappers have now been trained in emergency response, prevention, and disaster recovery.

Maria Mutagamba, nicknamed the ‘Water Lady’, is Uganda’s Minister of Water and Environment. She is the first woman to be appointed Minister of Water and has been President of the African Ministers’ Council on Water for the last two years. Mutagamba is an active advocate for water issues in Africa and at international levels. She believes that mainstreaming gender in the context of integrated water-resources management is critical to attaining the Millennium Development Goals. “Government bodies should ensure gender-sensitive water and sanitation infrastructure and services and equal access, voice and participation of women and men in decision-making at all levels of water-resources management. At the grass-root level, however, we are far from involving women in the planning processes. This requires a great deal of effort in education and

building awareness of the issues involved and a move towards changing the culture of decision-making,” she states. Under her stewardship, the Ministry of Water and the Environment is implementing programmes to improve the livelihoods of people, particularly women and girls, in rural areas, including construction and rehabilitation of earth dams and water tanks in the 84,000 km² of dry lands called the cattle corridor.

The numbers of women calling for gender sensitive disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation and sustainable development grow daily as does their impact. **Graciela Ortúzar** has been Mayor of Lampa, Chile, since 2004 – a rural community of some 70,000 inhabitants. Before becoming Mayor, she was the city’s Secretary of Planning. During that time she pushed for the repair of a waste water system for various neighbourhoods, in addition to other large investment projects in urban improvement. Ortúzar was appointed a Making Cities Resilient Champion, based on her community management after the February 2010 earthquake in Chile.

Selina Hayat Ivy is the first elected mayor of Narayanganj City Corporation in Bangladesh. She is a social activist, the former mayor of the Narayanganj municipality as well as the current Vice-President of the Municipality Association of Bangladesh - the coordinating body for mayors of municipalities in the country. During her last nine years in office as Mayor of Narayanganj Municipality she retrieved 90 percent of the land from ‘land-grabbers’ and has led various initiatives to make her city pollution free and environmentally sustainable. During Ivy’s various tenures she has done remarkable work for municipal dwellers - better roads, drains, footpaths, public toilets, construction of kitchen markets, procurement of garbage removal trucks and flood rehabilitation projects. And as one commentary observed: “Why did the people of Narayanganj fall so head over heels in love with this woman? Simply because, unknown to her, she became a choice between good and evil, between honesty and corruption, between criminally-driven and voter-driven politics, between land-grabbing and land for public benefit. In short, Selina Hayat Ivy became a choice between hope and despair.”

Iderle Brénus Gerbier has worked with many organizations in support of women’s rights and food sovereignty in Haiti. She is a campaign coordinator for Food Sovereignty in Haiti and an advisor of the National Confederation of Peasant Women. What drives her? It is the “need to advance the struggle of women by redefining the concept of feminism in Haiti. To do this we have to reshuffle the cards and reduce the differences between our urban and peasant women. Right now there are two kinds of women: women with a capital W and women with a small w. October 15 was declared the “Day of the Haitian Peasant Woman, but unfortunately this day has never been commemorated. We have to recognize and appreciate women farmers for their significant socio-economic worth ... We need to increase their visibility in efforts to build food sovereignty in the country”.

Saheena is from a village in Bangladesh which floods every year. She learned to preserve foods, raise her house on stilts to protect it from floods, and use the radio to receive flood warnings. “I’m glad I know how to live with floods now. I can save my family, my belongings and my animals. My children are lucky too, as they have a mother who can teach them to survive a disaster,” she said. Saheena has also organized a committee of women to be prepared for floods. These efforts have saved many lives and empowered women.

Evidence of women and girls from all walks of life who are making a difference continues to emerge. Women are leading efforts in many communities across the globe. Though seldom recognized, their work saves lives, communities and families. In 1998, residents of the town of La Masica in Honduras received gender-sensitive training on early warning systems. The community then decided that men and women should participate equally in disaster management activities. Women replaced men who had abandoned continuous monitoring of the town’s early warning system. When Hurricane Mitch struck in the same year, the municipality was prepared and all residents were evacuated promptly, avoiding any deaths.

In *Women and Girls Last? Averting the Second Post-Katrina Disaster*, Elaine Enarson observes: “Women across the nation are also the lifeblood of voluntary organizations of all descriptions, now being pulled inexorably into relief work ... Long after we think Katrina over and done with, women whose jobs and professions in teaching, health care, mental health, crisis work, and community advocacy bring them into direct contact with affected families will feel the stress of ‘first responders’ whose work never ends.”

And as **Hillary Clinton** noted during the Women in the World Summit: “What does it mean to be a woman in the world? ... It means never giving up ... It means getting up, working hard and putting a country or a community on your back.”

Theme of International Day for Disaster Reduction

Women and Girls - the inVisible Force of Resilience



The aim of International Day for Disaster Reduction 2012 is to acknowledge and appreciate the millions of women and girls who make their communities more resilient to disasters and climate risks and thus to reap the benefits of and protect their development investments.

Too much of the work and achievements of women is of low- visibility – taken for granted. The 2012 IDDR theme draws attention to the fact that women’s contributions to protect and rebuild their communities before and after disasters are often unrecognized.

The International Disaster Reduction day 2012 will:

1. **Celebrate the contribution that women and girls** are making before, during and after disasters and in all decision making processes around the disaster risk reduction and sustainable development.
2. Highlight that the ability of women and girls to contribute is hindered by exclusion from participation and decision-making in disaster risk reduction and management processes as well as programmes and by poor understanding of gender inequality.
3. Move beyond the perception of women and girls as victims.
4. Present evidence of actions and initiatives by women and girls.

The International Day for Disaster Reduction is organized each year on 13 October (GA [resolution 64/200](#) of 21 December 2009). **This year it will be observed by the United Nations on Friday 12 October.** It is the most widely observed day for raising awareness about disaster risk reduction, creating social demand, and mobilizing the wider public to get involved and take ownership of the processes to create disaster resilience. This day will also build partnerships with organizations involved with gender and disaster risk reduction.

The United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction use the results to reinforce advocacy for gender-sensitive disaster risk reduction at national and local government levels; key forums such as the biennial Global Platform for disaster risk reduction; and in publications such as the Biennial Global Assessment Report on disaster risk reduction. It will ensure that that gender sensitive disaster risk reduction will be an integral feature of the planning for post 2015 Hyogo Framework for disaster risk reduction which is now underway.

While instituting gender sensitive disaster risk reduction is addressed in the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) – the current global disaster risk reduction framework - the [2011 Mid-Term Review of the HFA](#) found it is rarely taken into account when planning activities. This is echoed in *Women’s Views from Frontline* a civil society assessment. Initiated by the Huairou Commission, it surveyed women’s organizations involved in advancing development priorities in Latin America, the Caribbean, Asia, Africa, as well as in the Middle East and North Africa. Four major findings emerged including the:

- Disconnect between national programmes and grassroots organizations
- Exclusion of women from emergency preparedness and response programmes
- Lack of a shared definition of effective risk reduction in poor, vulnerable communities
- Untapped potential of organized constituencies of women with pro-poor practices

The HFA Mid-Term Review (2011) reveals that multilateral institutions do not have adequate knowledge of or the political commitment required to advance gender concerns in the field of resilience. The [2011 Global Assessment Report \(GAR\) on – Revealing Risk, Redefining Development](#) states, “A large number of countries concur with Tanzania, which identifies the lack of appropriate knowledge of ‘how and where to implement gender matters’ as the main barrier.” The report finds that only 26% of countries reported significant ongoing commitment to gender as a driver of progress.

Key Messages (KM) for IDDR 12

EMPOWER WOMEN AND GIRLS FOR A SAFER TOMORROW

- **Women and girls are empowered** to fully contribute to sustainable development through disaster risk reduction, particularly in the areas of environmental and natural resource management; governance; and urban and land use planning and social and economic planning – **the key drivers of disaster risk**

WOMEN AND GIRLS ARE POWERFUL AGENTS OF CHANGE

- *"In their vital but unsung roles, women reweave the fabric of their communities while men rebuilt the structure"* – Helen Cox, "Women in Bushfire Territory," in Enarson and Morrow (eds.), *The Gendered Terrain of Disaster*, p. 142
- **Women and girls are invaluable in disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation processes** if real community resilience and significant reduction of disaster impacts are to be achieved. Women must always be part of policy, planning and implementation processes
- Women and girls are 52% of the world's population and are among the most affected by disasters. **Their experience, knowledge and expertise are critical to climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction strategies and processes**
- **Household adaptation measures are more likely to take root if women are included in processes from beginning to end.** *"If you educate a man you educate an individual, but if you educate a woman you educate a family (nation).* – African Proverb
- Women and girls are powerful agents of change as they are activists, law makers, social workers, role models, community leaders, teachers, and mothers

A RESILIENT COMMUNITY IS A GENDER SENSITIVE COMMUNITY

- *"If we are going to see real development in the world then our best investment is women."* - Desmond Tutu, 1984 Nobel Peace Prize
- Gender inequality puts women, children and entire communities in danger when natural hazards strike. The weakest link can mean the destruction of the entire chain. **Gender inequality is a weak link - strengthening that link strengthens resilience**
- **Gender equality begins with education.** Women and girls must be included in public life. This begins with the education of boys and girls through to adulthood. This is how men and boys will become involved in removing the barriers that prevent women and girls from participating in the disaster risk reduction cycle
- **Women and girls are effective purveyors of information.** Information mechanisms must be two-way and accessible for equal inclusion of women's and men's voices

What Can You Do?

The 13 October is a global call to “Step Up for” by taking part in any action or activity on IDDR 12 that will showcase the contributions and actions of Women and Girls to build resilience. **For activity suggestions and ideas see [Annex 1](#) and [Annex 2](#).**

For More Information on Gender & Disaster Risk Reduction

- 🌐 UNISDR - www.unisdr.org/2012/iddr/
- 🌐 UN Women - www.unwomen.org/
- 🌐 Gender and Disaster Network - <http://www.gdnonline.org/>
- 🌐 Global Fund for Women - <http://www.globalfundforwomen.org/>
- 🌐 Groots International - www.groots.org/
- 🌐 The Huairou Commission - www.huairou.org/
- 🌐 ActionAid - www.actionaid.org/?intl=
- 🌐 Plan International - <http://plan-international.org/girls/>
- 🌐 Gender Network and Communities
www.preventionweb.net/english/professional/networks/list.php?cat_id=7&scat_id=38
- 🌐 HFA-Pedia - http://www.eird.org/wikiesp/index.php/G%C3%A9nero_y_RRD
- 🌐 Regional Center for Disaster Information (CRID)
<http://preparativosyrespuesta.cridac.org/component/content/category/47>
- 🌐 International Conference for Gender and Disasters - <http://conferenciageneroydesastres.org/>