



How can parliamentarians encourage their governments and aid agencies to include gender considerations in humanitarian assistance in emergency situations and disaster situations

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INTRODUCTION

For the purpose of this roundtable I have chosen to focus on just a few key areas where I believe parliamentarians can play a role in ensuring that gender considerations are included in disaster responses and management plans. As we heard yesterday in the key note address given by Her Excellency Mrs Men Sam An, our primary role is as policy makers and legislators and our focus should be on the ongoing well being and development of our nations' peoples. "The attention to gender issues in emergency situations now goes beyond the traditional concerns with 'women and children' as passive victims, to a recognition of men's and women's different needs, interests, vulnerabilities, capacities and coping strategies", as this widely broadens our mandate it also broadens our potential for long lasting positive change.

PREPLANNING

The crisis of thousands on the move, in immediate need of water, food and shelter does not, at first sight, permit the careful preparation or participatory approach required for gender work. The separation of relief and development

funds and personnel, the urgency and technical focus of relief work and the highly political nature of some emergencies, are all major constraints. Preplanning for disasters and including gender considerations into these plans will help to alleviate some of the stresses and demands one is immediately faced with when confronted by an emergency. There are a range of tools and mechanisms open to allow us to better plan and prepare for the future.

Social relations and gender analysis is a powerful tool for work on disaster preparedness and mitigation. It highlights the relations between men and women, which underpin the coping strategies adopted in response to specific emergencies. However, the usefulness of this type of analysis is limited by the amount of baseline data currently available.

It is important that we begin to collect this data as the use of such goes well beyond that of disaster relief management data.

In the planning stage we can also ensure that all government agencies involved in disaster and emergency relief efforts **develop policies and procedures regarding humanitarian (and relief) activities.** In 2004 Australia launched its new policy for Humanitarian Action. This new policy indicates a shift from reactive responses to a growing recognition that the humanitarian imperative has a place in development. It emphasises the strong link between development and humanitarian action and recognises poverty as a root cause of vulnerability. Australia's humanitarian action policy makes two specific references in its identification of areas of focus which I believe set a platform for engaging gender issues in disaster management

1. Firstly incorporate gender considerations in planning, design, response, monitoring and evaluation to reduce the differential impact of crises on women and men and to ensure the skills and capacities of both are fully utilised at all stages of activities.

2. Secondly reduce the vulnerability to and consequences of HIV/AIDS on those affected by humanitarian action and reduce the impact of crises on people living with HIV/AIDS.

Australia is by no means the only country to have undertaken such activities and preplanning. As we heard yesterday many countries have already begun this.

From this point Parliamentarians can then work to ensure **Terms Of Reference** demand that gender, population, family planning, and reproductive health activities are done in a manner that recognises their importance and potential to bring long lasting positive outcomes.

RESPONSE

Comprehensive preplanning provides us with a good guide for action following the immediate aftermath of natural disasters or during emergency situations – however we must remain vigilant at this point, with many competing demands and needs it is not surprising that issues regarding gender, reproductive health and family planning can become lost. As relief efforts are occurring we need to be **questioning our governments and relief agencies:**

- Do women have all the sanitary supplies they need?
- Is there somewhere safe for pregnant women to give birth?
- Are there adequate bathroom facilities, do they provide privacy for women?
- Are people safe in camps – free from all types of abuse and violence?
- Do women have the means available to them for preventing pregnancies?

We need to be asking these questions, demanding answers to them. Following on from a disaster there are generally many tasks at hand requiring immediate attention, without addressing some of these basic issues that women face their prospects of participating fully in the rebuilding phase will be greatly hampered.

Running parallel to this we need to be asking our governments **to cost in security measures in emergency situations** – women and children are particularly vulnerable to abuse in times of post conflict or following on from an emergency. A costed security package could include patrols within camps and significantly contribute to increasing people's level of security and mobility, allowing them greater opportunity to participate in the rebuilding phase.

REBUILDING

Just as a lot of attention should be paid to planning for a disaster, the more attention and planning time dedicated to rehabilitation and rebuilding the more of chance we have to **redress the imbalance** between the needs of men and women, ethnic groups, rural and regional communities and older and younger members of the community.

A practical example of blending gender considerations into the rebuilding phases can be seen by reviewing the reconstruction of a health clinic. When a health clinic is being rebuilt we need to be looking to see if the building is designed in a way that will support women to use as well as appeal to the broader public;

- are there adequate private facilities?
- can women and young people access it easily?
- does it have facilities for babies and mothers whilst they are waiting ?

Parliamentarians could insist on women being consulted in the reconstruction efforts and that they have avenues to have a voice in how and what gets built and how the reconstruction efforts will affect them. In this context parliamentarians could also insist that spending is based on credible evidence based research taking into account women's needs in that region and their particular health issues, for example fistula may be a big issue in some places and premature babies in another requiring separate costed strategies including medical facilities.

A tool that would allow for such an analysis is a **Gender Impact Statement**; Impact statements have been used in many settings and do help assess the impact's of new policies and programmes in a range of settings – Australia has recently adopted the *Family Impact Statement*; this means that all government policies must be reviewed in the light of the Family Impact Statement – this could be translated to the settings we are concerned with here today – gender in emergency and disaster situations and would be extremely useful. A gender impact statement could be used to assess the ways in which government and aid agencies conduct their relief activities. It could help identify simple things such as the safest means of distributing food, how best to provide care for people, as well as having a role in much larger undertakings such as the reconstruction of roads, schools and homes.