

BUILDING CLIMATE RESILIENCE FOR ALL: TOWARDS INCLUSIVE RECOVERY

THE ISSUE

FROM CRISIS TO RECOVERY: WOMEN'S ROLE IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION



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Inclusive recovery is crucial to resilient communities. As relief and recovery needs increase globally due to the escalating and compounding impacts of the climate crisis, it has become essential to ensure that we can both meet the immediate needs and, at the same time, support communities in becoming more resilient to future shocks. After a disaster hits, it's no longer sufficient to build back 'as it was', as communities aim to strengthen their resilience in the face of the climate crisis (see the recent [Resilient Recovery report by the Zurich Flood Resilience Alliance](#)). Critically, for effective and sustainable recovery, everyone in the community, including women and girls, must emerge more resilient.

THE CASE FOR RESILIENT RECOVERY

The climate crisis is getting worse, more quickly, and below the threshold of previously anticipated tipping point temperatures¹. An estimated 3.3 to 3.6 billion people are living in contexts that are highly vulnerable to climate change². Climate shocks increasingly interact with and further aggravate existing non-climate-related crises, such as conflict, health emergencies, and poverty. This means that the worst impacts of the climate crisis will continue to fall most heavily on the least able to cope - the poorest communities and the most marginalised groups within them.

Emergency relief and supporting these communities to return to a 'pre-disaster' state is, therefore, inadequate in the face of the worsening climate emergency. 'Building back better' is not a new idea, and is central to global commitments such as the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (GFDRR), of which the EU is a core donor and partner. Yet humanitarian programming remains chronically underfunded, with only around \$500 million of official development funding allocated to reconstruction, relief, and rehabilitation in 2020³.

1. [AR6 Synthesis Report: Climate Change](#). The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), March 2023.
2. [AR6 Synthesis Report: Climate Change](#). The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), March 2023.
3. Most aid funds go to just a few disasters. What about the rest? The New Humanitarian, June 2022.

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This is about 400 times less than what is needed according to some estimates⁴, let alone enough funding for forward-looking, risk-informed recovery approaches. We have a wealth of data on the likely future impacts of climate hazards on the environment, physical infrastructure, and communities themselves, and yet we continue to act as if we are only dealing with the situation as it is today.

RISK INFORMED, INCLUSIVE, AND MULTI-DIMENSIONAL RECOVERY

The impact of disasters is multidimensional, encompassing physical, social, and economic aspects. In particular, disasters tend to reinforce existing inequalities, aggravating climate-related challenges and disadvantages for the most marginalised groups and individuals in the community. Although men and women are all affected, it is rarely equal. It is well known, in fact, that women and girls are disproportionately impacted by disasters when local socio-cultural norms limit their mobility, participation in decision-making processes and access to economic resources⁵. Women’s low status in the community has also a negative impact on their ability to recover, as they are excluded from the creation of recovery strategies. When women are not involved, the strategies often do not effectively address their needs, such as ensuring they are included in community-level decision-making processes for resilient strategies (e.g. establishing women’s safe spaces)⁶, enabling them to have access to information and make informed decisions when future shocks occur, and reaching them with financial resources to rebuild their livelihoods. Additionally, psychosocial support services and community-level mental health programmes can play an important role in addressing psycho-social challenges when building resilient communities⁷.

Leaving women behind has a negative impact on the resilience of their entire communities. The recent report from the Zurich Flood Resilience Alliance defines resilient recovery as being risk informed, multi-dimensional, and inclusive⁸. Inclusivity is both the means and the end of resilient recovery. We know that including women in the decision-making process and encouraging them to take on leadership roles enhances decision-making and leads to more sustainable outcomes. Addressing gender is also key to enhancing and delivering overall disaster recovery and resilience building. For example, the two women in a community disaster management committee (CDMC) of eleven members in Nepal advocated successfully to plant 25kg of potatoes over the 10kg originally suggested to prevent soil erosion, the increased amount proved successful but also created a new revenue stream and market linkage for the community⁹.

While critical, this is not straightforward. It requires examining the root causes and drivers of the vulnerabilities of all marginalised groups, including women and girls - and understanding how they might change in the context of an evolving climate crisis, population fluctuations, and development interventions.

“Leaving women behind has a negative impact on the resilience of their entire communities.”



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4. Finance for climate action: Scaling up investment for climate and development’. Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment, London School of Economics and Political Science, 2022.

5. Building Resilience Through the Integration of Gender and Empowerment. Mercy Corps, January 2023.

6. [RETHINKING RESILIENCE: Prioritizing Gender Integration to Enhance Household and Community Resilience to Food Insecurity in the Sahel](#). Mercy Corps, 2014.

7. The USAID-supported RIPA-North program in Ethiopia has implemented psychosocial support services to female and male youth transitioning out of pastoralism due to the drought crisis.

8. Towards transformative action: The unfulfilled promise of resilient recovery. Zurich Flood Resilience Alliance (ZFRA), 2023.

9. Building Resilience Through the Integration of Gender and Empowerment. Mercy Corps, January 2023.

> MERCY CORPS' BRIGE TOOLKIT:

To address the intersection of climate and social impacts that disproportionately affect women and girls, Mercy Corps designed the BRIGE toolkit (Building Resilience through Integration of Gender and Empowerment). Building upon existing resilience-focused programmes implemented by Mercy Corps across three countries -Indonesia, Nepal, and Niger- BRIGE included the pilot of gender and social inclusion measurement and implementation tools across the programme cycle to enhance the resilience capacity of the communities. Building upon previous Mercy Corps studies and experience on gender and resilience, BRIGE identified 3 key pathways to improve the participation of women and other marginalised groups in 1) household and 2) community decision-making and 3) access to market linkages.

The implementation of BRIGE helped foster household and community dialogues around social norms that inhibit the empowerment of women and girls. A qualitative study implemented at the end of its initial pilot showed that BRIGE led to women's increased perception of self-confidence and to men's increased respect for women, resulting in women having more meaningful participation in household and community decision-making.

Implemented along with income-generating activities and financial literacy training¹⁰, BRIGE facilitated opportunities to build resilient individuals and communities through more equitable dialogues and the development of adaptive strategies that are inclusive of critical assets, such as savings and alternative incomes, that have the potential to support households to absorb and bounce back from disaster impacts¹¹.

Since its initial design in Nepal, Indonesia, and Niger, Mercy Corps has adapted and implemented BRIGE in Niger and Zimbabwe with positive results on improved perceptions of equitable norms among women and men.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE PROGRAMS

Post-disaster landscapes require rapid action that does not allow for comprehensive assessments of the compounding nexus of social and climate impacts, however as we explored in this article, understanding the complexities of the disadvantages experienced by the most marginalised is crucial to building resilient communities. Responders will be battling to save lives today and will rarely have the resources - financial, human, or mental - to consider these complex intersecting issues. Therefore, preparedness and planning are vital.

Being intentionally 'inclusive' in our post-disaster interventions means adopting programmatic approaches that place gender and other intersectional identities at the centre of analysis and design of all activities, and making efforts to engage directly with marginalised individuals providing them with targeted information, tools and skills.

Drawing from Mercy Corps' experience in Nepal, our Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) First approach applied both GESI-focused considerations to program activities. For example, information was made available in local languages, involved marginalised people in skills-building training, and in the formulation of



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community-level strategies, and specific gender and social inclusion interventions to shift harmful social norms. These included analyses to capture the different impacts on women and marginalised groups through monitoring reflection sessions, implementing household dialogue to open opportunities for women and girls to participate in decision-making, and co-creating Integrated Community Assessment and Action Plans (ICAAPs) through dedicated focus group discussions involving women and marginalised group members to ensure equitable resource distribution and divided tasks.

Committing to resilient recovery is essential as we face the growing challenges of the climate crisis. We must invest in the social and economic domains as much as in the environmental and physical aspects during the recovery programming if we are to deliver on our commitment to 'build back better.'

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10. [Priming Resilience with Intra-Household Change](#). Mercy Corps, 2018.

11. [Priming Resilience with Intra-Household Change](#). Mercy Corps, 2018.