

ENHANCING PUBLIC SECTOR ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY FOR GENDER INCLUSION IN RESPONSE TO NATURAL HAZARD INDUCED DISASTERS AND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Context

Following the declaration of COVID-19 as a pandemic by the WHO in March 2020, the Governments of India and Nepal imposed nationwide lockdowns. These lockdowns affected national economies and the lives and livelihoods of the most vulnerable and marginalised sections of society, including women. In response, several measures were taken by governments to protect the poor. However, systemic governance failures have been observed and reported widely in emergency relief, the provision of WASH services, protection against domestic violence, and employment opportunities for women. In addition, most federal governments decisions to arrest the spread of COVID-19 have been perceived as top-down, with little or no say from the local government, local institutions, and communities.

This project aimed to analyse the national disaster risk reduction landscape and engage with local governments and community-based disaster risk management institutions to gather their perspectives on how resilience can be strengthened by better integrating gender considerations in policies and practices and improving transparency and accountability.

In addition, the research analysed the effectiveness of existing governance mechanisms to deal with frequent disasters such as floods and cyclones during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how disaster management policies were used or applied to limit the spread of the pandemic. Finally, the research also diagnosed the successes and failures of governance in managing COVID-19 and disasters during the pandemic.

Objectives

1. Review and document the impacts of the COVID-19 and natural hazard induced disasters on women in South Asia, with a focus on India and Nepal during the last two years.
2. Review preparedness, relief, and recovery measures from the viewpoints of gender, employment, governance, and intersectionality.
3. Identify and recommend short, medium, and long-term measures for appropriate gender-responsive measures during future disasters and COVID-19 waves for policymakers and practitioners at the local government level.

Focus group discussion with community members in the Jyamire village of the Manhari Rural Municipality of Nepal.

Credit: Duryog Nivaran



Findings

Key impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and natural hazard induced disasters on women in South Asia are as below:

1) Livelihoods

- Women's livelihoods in South Asia are predominantly in the informal sector and in small and micro enterprises.
- Workers in the informal sector in South Asia were hit hardest.
- Domestic workers (who are mostly female) lost their jobs during the pandemic.

2) Health

- Line of work, lack of knowledge, and lack of access to healthcare or vaccination programmes resulted in a higher risk of COVID-19 infection.
- The pandemic reduced women's access to essential healthcare services.
- Loss of income has also resulted in negative health impacts.
- Increases in mental health issues and cases of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) and related injuries were evident.

3) Security and Gender Based Violence & Intimate Partner Violence (GBV/IPV)

- Women who were already in abusive family relationships were trapped in homes.
- Uncertainty regarding future livelihoods, led to an increase in domestic violence and marital rape.

4) Changing household roles and responsibilities

- Women's household workload increased significantly.
- The roles of men and other members of the family showed some change.

Recommendations

- Gender transformative action in a community in ordinary times can be helpful during emergencies.
- The Government, as the lead authority, needs to ensure the documentation of gender and disability disaggregated data/information - for women/girls, with disability/senior citizens/ marginalised and other at-risk groups.
- Mechanisms should be in place to respond to increases in violence effectively. The state police as well as the local police should ensure that people report domestic violence and abuse during emergencies.
- There may be vaccine-hesitation in rural areas, so completion of vaccination doses needs to be ensured.
- The National and State governments need to prioritise maternal and child health issues during emergencies.
- Governments need to prioritise sexual and reproductive health needs during emergencies
- Social protection nets have to be strengthened by the government for the informal workers.

Interview with Saru B.K from Mahila tatha Balbalika Sarokar Kendra, in makwanpur District of Nepal. The district-based NGO works on girls' education.

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Enhancing public sector accountability and transparency for gender inclusion in response to natural hazard induced disasters and the COVID-19 pandemic in South Asia

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