

Signpost to Bali

WORLD WATER FORUM 2024

Capacity Building for Gender-Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR)

INSIGHTS DOCUMENT



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Context

The World Water Forum, set for Bali this May, is an international event organized every three years. It brings together government officials, multilateral institutions, academics, civil society, and private sector representatives, serving as a platform for sharing best practices, case studies, innovative models, and lessons from successes and failures in the global water and sanitation sector. As a precursor to the World Water Forum, Dasra hosted the Signpost to Bali webinar series in partnership with SaciWATERS and Women for Water Partnership.



This webinar series aimed at highlighting community voices, especially those of women and youth, across the sanitation value chain. The second Signpost to Bali session titled 'Capacity Building for Gender-Inclusive Disaster Risk Resilience (DRR)' highlighted the disproportionate impact of disasters on women, youth, and other marginalized communities, especially in the context of sanitation services.



Disaster Resilience & Sanitation

Climate change is one of the most pressing challenges, having an adverse impact on communities, especially in South Asia. Considering its geographic and climatic conditions, India is one of the most disaster-prone countries.



Source: Direct Relief

Out of its **36 states and union territories, 28 are disaster prone**. Frequent occurrence of disasters such as floods, earthquakes, cyclones, etc., impair urban infrastructure systems.

Factors such as poverty, environmental growth, unchecked growth, and a rapid increase in population, further enhance vulnerability in context of climate change and disasters. In such scenarios, the adverse impacts of disasters disproportionately affect vulnerable communities, including the urban poor, women, adolescent girls, and children. Urban poor settlements, lacking adequate housing and infrastructure, are the most vulnerable to disasters. Only 6% of the poorest 20% have access to non-shared improved sanitation, compared to 93.4% of the wealthiest 20%.

Similarly, healthcare and sanitation access is gravely impacted due to factors such as affordability, in turn inhibiting health and personal hygiene. Managing menstrual hygiene and health becomes an added challenge under such strenuous conditions.

Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WSH) facilities are pivotal in maintaining public health indicators, and compromises in them often lead to outbreaks of water-borne diseases amidst disasters. This was evidently visible during the Covid-19 pandemic, where shared and poorly maintained water and sanitation facilities, were a major cause of outbreak aggravation. Therefore, it is imperative that public policy, especially for sanitation and public health adapts to include the changing needs.

The aftermath of disasters is often managed through responsive measures, but this approach undermines previous investments in sanitation infrastructure and the progress made in making it accessible to communities. Therefore, it is crucial to focus on disaster preparedness and planning to mitigate potential damages.

To mainstream DRR efforts and make them more inclusive, it is imperative that:



Urban poor and marginalized communities have adequate information regarding disaster planning and response



Water and sanitation infrastructure should be designed and developed in tandem with climate risk mitigators



Disaster management plans should address gender needs and social inequalities, promoting equitable access to infrastructure.



Prioritize frontline workers' safety



Define minimum standards for sanitation infrastructure in disaster prone vulnerable areas



Strengthen decision-making processes through the Urban Local Bodies



Deep Diving into Challenges at the Community-level

Springshed Management as a Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) Strategy

Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) entails adopting a proactive and preventive approach towards minimizing the impact of disasters. It aims at building collective community capabilities to sustain through disasters, with the help of progressive multi-stakeholder engagements.

Similarly, Springshed Management is a proactive measure aimed at enhancing water security and resilience against drought. It focuses on the area contributing to a spring's water source and involves mapping springsheds, implementing sustainable water management practices, protecting springs from deforestation and pollution, and engaging the community in spring water conservation efforts.

Springs serve as the primary source of water for people residing in the Himalayas. Over the years, climate change has caused springs to slowly dry out, adversely affecting water security in cities like Shimla and Darjeeling. This disproportionately impacts women, who are primarily responsible for fetching water.



Source: Water and Disasters | UN-Water

Since major rivers in the Indian peninsula originate in the Himalayan region, periodic drying out of the springs can have a trickling effect across Indian cities. To put things in perspective, a water demand assessment was conducted in two Himalayan towns – Kolbong Khasmohol and Chhota Mohua. In both towns, the water demand exceeded the current water supply by 17%, indicating an imminent water shortage.

Many indigenous communities inhabit these towns and possess traditional knowledge for conserving water and water bodies. This traditional wisdom, combined with scientific methods, was utilized to preserve the springs. Initiatives included afforestation near springsheds, building counter trenches, constructing ponds, monitoring rainfall data and spring discharge, and assessing water quality. All these efforts actively involved the community, with women taking a leading role.

Initially, there was resistance from local communities, but as the spring discharge improved over time, they actively participated. After witnessing success, the communities independently continued with interventions for springshed management.



Source: Capacity Building for Disaster Risk Management - PrepareCenter

Understanding Grass-root Level Interventions in Bangladesh

In Bangladesh, climate change poses a severe threat, especially in the coastal areas through extreme conditions such as floods and cyclones. In rural coastal regions, climatic adversities compromise sanitation facilities through inundation and saltwater contamination, disproportionately affecting women and other vulnerable communities. Ensuring women's access to safe sanitation facilities is thus imperative for promoting optimum health and well-being.

Water Aid Bangladesh adopts an inclusive and a participatory approach to integrate climate resilience in inclusive sanitation. This includes vulnerability assessment and planning, community engagement, capacity building, technology and innovation, and informing policy. A Participatory Ward Vulnerability Assessment is undertaken in the inception phase of the intervention to understand the community's WSH vulnerabilities; especially in regions affected the most by climate change and disasters. Here, community consultations and surveys drive targeted interventions for system strengthening.

Additionally, WaterAid Bangladesh prioritizes context-specific innovative solutions to ensure access to sanitation facilities. For instance, in the southern coastal villages where the Munda community resides, frequent tidal surges and cyclones severely impact their access to toilets. To tackle this challenge, toilets were constructed on raised platforms with lock-enabled gate valves. This design ensures that the septic tank functions as a sealed chamber, preventing any spillage of faecal sludge.





Capacity Building for Disaster Resilience

Role of Capacity Building in Disaster Risk Resilience

Capacity building for disaster resilience plays a pivotal role in minimizing the impact of disasters, helping reduce the vulnerability of the population. It also aids planning for prompt and sustained execution of disaster risk plans and frameworks. Here, capacity building entails optimizing the community's skills, strengths, and resources to effectively respond to and manage disasters. To ensure disaster resilience, it is important to devise customized solutions contextual to geographies and stakeholders, and to emphasize on enhancing the role of local leadership for increased ownership.

Moreover, effective capacity building should extend beyond theoretical frameworks and plans to be functional. It should involve comprehensive planning, fostering ownership and partnerships, and integrating various actors and stakeholders. Adopting a multi-pronged, multi-stakeholder approach to capacity building enhances inclusive disaster resilience and response. This approach should engage stakeholders ranging from national and state-level policymakers to local leadership, community organizations, and the private sector. Prioritizing the awareness and preparedness of communities, particularly women who bear a disproportionate burden, is paramount.

Gender Inclusive Capacity Building for Disaster Risk Resilience: How and Why It Matters

Traditionally, women shoulder the responsibility for household water and sanitation tasks, including collecting, storing water, and maintaining hygiene facilities. However, their vulnerability to WSH-related issues is exacerbated by poor access to these resources. During disasters, this vulnerability regarding WSH and sanitation services intensifies. Therefore, enabling women's participation in decision-making for gender-inclusive disaster response and planning is crucial to ensure inclusive access and usage of sanitation facilities. Empowering women's leadership at the community level for capacity building and disaster preparedness also guarantees the long-term sustainability of inclusive services.

Gender Inclusive Capacity Building Initiatives Present an Array of Benefits:



ADDRESSING GENDER-SPECIFIC VULNERABILITIES

Involving women in capacity building measures help in accounting for specific challenges faced by women, making disaster planning and response more inclusive and ensuring equitable access to sanitation facilities and services.



LEVERAGING LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

Women and minority communities possess invaluable local or indigenous knowledge concerning WSH practices and disaster mitigation and response, rooted in their heritage and lineage within the geography. Harnessing these insights can significantly enhance community resilience.



POSITIONING WOMEN AS AGENTS OF CHANGE

To enhance DRR's effectiveness and long-term sustainability, having a gender-balanced and diverse workforce is vital. Empowering women as agents of change and integrating their insights will facilitate an inclusive disaster response. This approach will also contribute to community engagement, mobilization, and participation.



STRENGTHENING INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY

Engaging women in capacity building efforts enables the incorporation of specific challenges they face. This, in turn, enhances the inclusivity of disaster planning and response, ensuring equitable access to sanitation facilities and services.

To enhance inclusive capacity building for disaster response in Bangladesh, particularly concerning sanitation, ITN-BUET has developed two training manuals tailored for Department of Public Health Engineering Officials and Municipality Personnel.

These manuals prioritize gender inclusion across all stages of WASH services, menstrual health management, and sanitation entrepreneurship. They emphasize the significance of integrating gender inclusion in various phases of project planning, including project design, resource allocation, gender-responsive technologies and design, gender-disaggregated data collection, and monitoring and evaluation.

Conclusion

As disasters affect genders, age groups, and communities differently, it's clear that women, children, persons with disabilities, and other vulnerable groups bear a disproportionate burden. Thus, a comprehensive approach to disaster resilience, encompassing all genders and communities, is imperative. Given that community members, particularly women, often act as the first responders, their involvement in capacity building for disaster preparedness and mitigation is pivotal. This grassroots engagement not only strengthens resilience but also mitigates adversities effectively.



Annexure

Speaker Profiles



Ms. Mariet Verhoef-Cohen

Ms. Mariet has served as the President of Women for Water Partnership (WfWP) since 2014. In her capacity as president, she has garnered global attention for the 'clean water for women' initiative, alongside advocating for gender-responsive sanitation solutions. Ms. Mariet has played a pivotal role in expanding the WfWP international network, which is dedicated to ensuring women's access to safe drinking water. Presently, the WfWP comprises 27 women's organizations spanning across 100 countries in South America, the Caribbean, Africa, Asia, and Europe.



Ms. Kusum Athukorala

Ms. Kusum has worked across rural development, integrated water resources management, gender and water, and has established and nurtured an array of national and international organizations related to sustainable water management and climate change, such as the Global Water Partnership (GWP), SaciWATERS, WfWP and NetWwater, and is the Regional Chair GWP South Asia Regional Water Partnership. In the run up to World Water Forum 10 in May 2024 in Bali, Ms. Kusum has organized a global consultative process, "Signposts to Bali – the Voice of the Unheard" that focuses on engaging with women and youth through webinars and onsite hybrid meetings. The process will produce a draft document to be discussed at the Forum, and then link with the UN Call for Action and Agenda 2030.



Ms. Anindita Mukherjee

Ms. Anindita is the Senior Policy and Urban Development Specialist at Scaling City Institutions for Asia and India, GWSC, AIT Thailand, and is an Urban Economist by training. Previously, she was an Associate Fellow at CPR's Scaling City Institutions for India (SCI-FI) initiative. She has worked extensively on areas related to the economics of sanitation service delivery in India, monitoring and evaluation of public schemes and programmes, and in economic and planning issues related to urban development, land management and urban sanitation. She is also a member of the National Faecal Sludge and Septage Management (NFSSM) Alliance that works towards building an enabling environment to scale inclusive sanitation in India. The Alliance has also developed a framework to mainstream WSH in DRR, which includes recommendations across various aspects around mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery.



Mr. Kabindra Sharma

Mr. Kabindra is an Associate Fellow at SaciWATERS, and has a strong background in Political Science and an expertise in water security issues. With a Master's and MPhil in Political Science, and nearing completion of his PhD from Sikkim University, Mr. Kabindra's research focuses on understanding depleting water resources as a non-traditional security threat. At SaciWATERS, he is actively engaged in a project aimed at enhancing coastal resilience in South Asia, where SaciWATERS serves as a knowledge partner, offering policy advocacy support. Before joining SaciWATERS, Mr. Kabindra served as a Senior Project Fellow from 2020 to 2023, contributing to the national project titled "Spring Rejuvenation for Water Security in the Himalayas" under the Ministry of Forest Environment & Climate Change, Government of India.

Annexure

Speaker Profiles



Mr. Saief Manzoor

Mr. Saief is the Deputy Team Leader of WaterAid Bangladesh's largest project, Go For Impact, and brings over 14 years of experience in WSH. He specializes in integrating technical and social elements, particularly in climate-vulnerable regions like the Southern Coastal area, where he ensures community ownership and the effective operation of vital facilities.



Dr. Mahreen Matto

Dr Mahreen Matto is a Team Lead at the National Institute of Urban Affairs, and is an environmental researcher and capacity-building trainer with more than 15 years of experience in mainstreaming urban water and sanitation management across human settlements in India, South Asia and Africa. She has a background in sanitation service delivery, citywide inclusive sanitation, faecal sludge management, city sanitation planning, decentralized wastewater management, and water and sanitation safety planning. She has authored multiple publications and guides on best practices and tools for WSH practitioners and policymakers.



Ms. Tazrina Habib Ananya

Ms. Tazrina Habib Ananya is working as a Knowledge Management Specialist at ITN – BUET, which is a Centre for Water Supply, Sanitation and Waste Management under Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET). Previously she worked as a WSH Officer at UNICEF Bangladesh. She received her bachelor's degree in Urban and Regional Planning from Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET). Through her work experience in the past 10 years, she is equipped with a well-rounded skill set and practical knowledge as a professional in program planning, implementation, and monitoring in WSH.



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