



Surviving Disasters: investing in capacities of women and poor communities to build resistance

Juana Balbina (Honduras), Sengul Ackar (Turkey)

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Building Bridges with the Grassroots: Scaling up through knowledge sharing

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SURVIVING DISASTERS

INVESTING IN CAPACITIES OF WOMEN AND POOR COMMUNITIES TO BUILD RESILIENCE

Disasters cause death and destruction. For the poor, the effects are devastating. Fragile delivery systems and infrastructure breakdown completely, destroying homes, livelihoods. Yet the relief and reconstruction processes that come in the wake of disasters, bring unprecedented resources and attention to communities and offer women opportunities to rebuild their lives in ways that reconfigure the relationships among women, their communities and the government.

Insights from post-disaster experiences

- ❖ **Post disaster efforts tend to be highly centralized, frequently marginalizing both local authorities and communities from decision-making processes.**
- ❖ **Both disaster preparedness and reconstruction programs led by the government tend to invest high-tech interventions that disregard the value of community participation and the contributions of women in restoring the lives of families and communities.**
- ❖ **When women are placed at the center of rehabilitation processes, they enhance the efficiency with which information, resources and services are delivered to disaster-hit communities.**
- ❖ **Disaster and development tend to be perceived by professionals as two separate areas in which different kinds of 'expertise' are required. For disaster-prone communities these two things are inextricably linked: by building women's capacities to access resources, services and decision making spaces, we are in fact addressing their development priorities of their communities while simultaneously enhancing their abilities to cope with disasters.**

GROOTS INTERNATIONAL NETWORK

Groots International is a thirteen year old network that connects independent women centered community development focused groups in more than forty countries. To build long term relationships for social change and sustainable development, network members collaborate to:

- Foster increased opportunities for peer learning among grassroots groups to energize leaders, accelerated innovation and identify shared principles and processes.
- Promote a new knowledge base generated from these experiences and practices to mainstream the governance and development approaches operating in poor communities
- Engage systems of public power to promote a shift in resource and development strategies associations of the poor have the power to plan toward approaches where local and allocate significant resources.

Groots International in collaboration with Huairou Commission (a coalition of grassroots women's networks and professional partners) has been developing DisasterWatch: a campaign that demonstrates and advocates for expanding the role of poor women and communities in post-disaster reconstruction efforts.

The World Bank has contracted the Groots network to undertake case studies of post disaster efforts of communities to address their development priorities. These case studies document the experiences of communities in Turkey, India and Honduras.

In addition, the Bernard Van Leer Foundation has supported Groots International to produce four videos highlighting children's experiences of disasters and the transformations brought about through the efforts of women and their communities. These videos are based on experiences of children in Jamaica, India, Turkey and Honduras.

**Contact: grootsss@earthlink.net
www.groots.org**

COMITE DE EMERGENCIA GARIFUNA, HONDURAS

In Honduras, the Comité de Emergencia Garifuna (Garifuna Emergency Committee of Honduras) has supported Garifuna communities affected by Hurricane Mitch in 1998 to mobilize for reconstruction and in ways that address long term livelihoods, food security, cultural preservation and environmental protection of the Garifuna people. This Afro-Indigenous, majority women's group has raised funds to build houses with and for single mothers, support farmers and fisher people, share food with children and elderly, train youth and women in artisan work and other income generating programs and strengthen communities. In 16 severely affected and marginalized towns, communities created tool banks that lend farm implements to farmers. Farmers here are mostly poor women who work in non-mechanised, subsistence farming. Thus their efforts to address food shortages and the loss of livelihoods caused by the hurricane have improved their ability to secure land tenancy, address long term development challenges and build their resilience to future food shortages. **Contact: afro@hondutel.hn**

SWAYAM SHIKSHAN PRAYOG, INDIA

In India, following the earthquake in 1993, Swayam Shikshan Prayog, which was appointed Community Participation Consultants to the Government of Maharashtra led World Bank funded Repair and Strengthening Program. SSP was called in to train and support grassroots women's collectives as official communication assistants. This required women leaders to inform and motivate homeowners on information on entitlements and procedures. Women trained in earthquake- safe construction techniques also monitored the repair and strengthening of houses. In addition, at official forums, women leaders provided feedback to the government officials on the progress in construction. This included reporting corrupt practices of Government engineers.

Following the earthquake in Gujarat in 2001, SSP has facilitated a community –community exchanges and capacity building process between experienced women leaders from Maharashtra and women's groups in Gujarat organizing and accessing entitlements for housing and improving access to basic services. In both locations women's collectives mobilized as part of post-disaster reconstruction have reduced corrupt practices of middlemen (who profit from the lack of information that communities have) and built their capacities to address ongoing development priorities such as water, sanitation, electricity, health services and schools. Today SSP partners with 1680 savings and credit groups with over 22,507 women members to build capacities to address credit and livelihoods, health and education water & sanitation.

Contact: Ssp2000@vsnl.com
www.sspindia.org

FOUNDATION FOR THE SUPPORT OF WOMEN'S WORK, TURKEY

In Turkey following the Marmara earthquake in 1999, women supported by the Foundation for the Support of Women's Work began organizing immediately after the earthquake and sustained their involvement through the relief and reconstruction process. Women helped to direct relief resources to those in need of them. They organized to improve sanitation facilities and food quality in the tent cities. Subsequently women have organized nine women and children's centers in the prefabricated temporary housing settlements in Izmit, Adapazari and Duzce. These multi-purpose centers are places for women to meet, organize, invite officials for dialogue as well as spaces for running early child care and education services. Women are also organizing savings and credit groups, starting economic initiatives and housing cooperatives to address the problem of permanent housing for tenants who lost their homes but are not eligible for replacement housing from the Government. At present, 2000 women are organized in registered organizations through which they undertake small businesses, organize community services and negotiate with government and banks for land, financial services and housing.

Contact: kedv@tnn.net

CONSTRUCTION RESOURCE AND DEVELOPMENT CENTRE, JAMAICA

CRDC has been working since 1984 to get women involved in shelter and construction activities. It was the first organization in Jamaica to set up a women's construction collective. The Collective trains and places women in construction related businesses. CRDC has a women's housing advice line which provides technical, legal, financial assistance for low income women in search of affordable housing solutions.

Following the extensive damage caused by Hurricanes Gilbert and Hugo in 1988-89, CRDC found that communities were not well prepared for such disasters. The trainings emphasized disaster mitigation through safe construction practices. These practices prevent structural damage to buildings and thus substantially reduce injuries and deaths. CRDC developed training materials. The Safe-Roof Retrofitting Project, launched in 1994 educated 17 hurricane-prone communities i.e. 1,050 households on how to build hurricane resistant roofs. This training program and has been the basis for similar roof retrofitting programs in four other Caribbean countries.

CRDC is part of an active network of Caribbean organizations, interest groups and communities involved in disaster mitigation, including the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management (ODPEM), National Housing Trust and The Caribbean Disaster Emergency Response Agency. Local authorities have also requested CDRC to conduct training for them.

CRDC is currently working with 8 parishes across Jamaica to strengthen the participation of women and poor communities in water and sanitation programs.

crdc@jol.com.jm