Oxfam Humanitarian Field Studies

Gender Mainstreaming During Disasters: The Case of the Tsunami in India
March 2007

Oxfam International

Anawim

IMPROVING EMERGENCY RESPONSE

The tsunami disaster of December 2004 affected millions of people, dramatically magnifying the challenges that survivors and aid providers face in smaller emergencies elsewhere around the world. In 2005, Oxfam launched a program to investigate social, economic, and health issues that are critical to the recovery of tsunami survivors. Working through partners in universities and institutes in the region, Oxfam is carrying out studies that combine data and perspectives from disaster-affected communities with existing knowledge from related fields. Our goals are to strengthen the programs of Oxfam and other humanitarian aid providers for this and future emergencies, and to improve accountability to those we aim to help. This report is one of a series of summaries of the Oxfam Humanitarian Field Studies.

ABSTRACT

The 2004 tsunami had disastrous consequences for entire coastal regions bordering the Indian Ocean. Yet the tsunami's impact on the affected populations varied according to their pre-disaster vulnerabilities. Specifically, gender roles contributed to the vulnerability of girls and women by limiting their social rights and access to resources. This study, which was conducted by researchers from the Anawim Trust in Tamil Nadu, India, documents ways in which 10 local Indian NGOs brought a gender dimension to their post-tsunami emergency and rehabilitation programs in the state of Tamil Nadu, and it offers recommendations to help local and international NGOs improve their gender mainstreaming efforts at both the programmatic and organizational levels.

INTRODUCTION

In India, the 2004 tsunami affected nearly 2,260 kilometers of the coastline, centering on the states of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, and Puduchery (formerly Pondicherry), as well as the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Waves as high as 10 meters penetrated up to three kilometers inland, taking an estimated 18,400 lives and affecting more than 2.79 million people in more than 900 villages. The loss of lives and livelihoods was greatest for those who lived and worked near the sea. In many places, raw materials and tools for income-generation enterprises were damaged or destroyed. The tsunami also caused extensive damage to critical social, occupational, and physical infrastructure and the environment. This damage will have a long-term impact on the further development of communities and livelihoods, including microenterprises and home-based occupations.

The destruction caused by the tsunami, however, was not just a natural phenomenon. It occurred in a society shaped by gender roles that determine access to resources and social rights and responsibilities.[1] While men might face discrimination based on their ethnic, political, economic, or social backgrounds, women generally face discrimination based on their gender in addition to other kinds of social discrimination. Though the tsunami affected many men and women, the severity of its impact varied according to each person's pre-disaster social, economic, and political power or vulnerability. Social norms differentially influenced the capacity of men, women, boys, and girls to survive the disaster, and they affected the conditions that survivors faced in its aftermath.

Although this paper does not focus on how the tsunami affected men and women differently, many of these issues did arise during focus group discussions in communities. For example, official government data shows that most of the people killed in these districts were women and children, and informants described the social, cultural, and economic reasons why women and children are more vulnerable during disasters. The widespread death and destruction and social upheaval also caused changes in gender roles and relations, including increased levels of domestic violence against women. Finally, the loss of homes and informal work sites, such as roadside stands, was significant, and also more difficult to quantify and identify than the destruction of boats and other livelihood tools. Although this type of destruction undermined many productive activities of women, relief agencies and programs seldom addressed it directly.

Given that the tsunami's impact varied according to gender, how did humanitarian assistance provided by governments and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) challenge, change, or reinforce gender role stereotypes? Can NGOs design and implement gender-sensitive programming during disasters, and what is the impact of this kind of intervention? If NGOs strive to improve the social and economic status of women, girls, and other marginalized groups in their programming, can disaster relief build back better after disasters so that communities are more just and equitable places for marginalized populations to live?

STUDY RATIONALE AND OBJECTIVES

While some studies have identified the gendered impacts of the tsunami,[2] few have systematically studied the efforts on the part of NGOs to "mainstream gender" (see definition below) in their relief, rehabilitation, and reconstruction activities. The present study is an attempt to fill this gap, documenting policies and actions taken by NGOs to enhance the agency of women, vulnerable men, and excluded groups during emergency disaster assistance operations in Nagapattinam, Cuddalore, and Kanniyakumari districts. A second objective is to identify both challenges and factors that facilitate effective work on these issues. Thirdly, the study will present recommendations for humanitarian practitioners and will identify areas for future research.

Several key international agreements, including the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action and the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), have identified the need for gender mainstreaming in development and relief work. Many elements of a gender mainstreaming agenda can be found in other human rights covenants and in some individual countries' national human rights laws, as well. In the aftermath of the Indian Ocean tsunami, a new United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) resolution, ratified by a majority of UN member states, reaffirmed all the commitments made in the Beijing Platform to support women in disaster situations, including a government's responsibility to use a gender perspective in disaster management and preparedness policies.

The commonly accepted and most widely used definition of gender mainstreaming is the one adopted by ECOSOC:

> *Mainstreaming Gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programs in all areas and all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve Gender Equality.[3]*

The 1995 Beijing Platform of Action noted that achieving gender equality through gender mainstreaming would require that "… governments and other actors should promote an active and visible policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective in all policies and programs, so that, before decisions are taken, an analysis is made of the effects on women and men, respectively."[4]

Mainstreaming gender in development and humanitarian assistance programming focusing on the specific concerns of women, men, boys, and girls and the relations be-

tween them. By focusing on gender relations in program design and implementation, development and relief assistance can empower women and work toward achieving gender equality. In many parts of the world, women are discriminated against by their families and communities because of socially constructed gender norms. In order for women to benefit equally from programs, policies must directly address the subordinate position of women relative to men. While focusing on women's empowerment, it is also important to consider the gender hierarchies and vulnerabilities of young men and excluded groups of men in program design. Central to gender mainstreaming is analysis of individual and community roles and relationships, including social rules and institutions that produce and reproduce these relationships and reinforce the roles that determine who gets and does what, in both public and private domains. A gender analysis also reveals the ways that policies and programs can exacerbate or ignore the subordinate position of women and some men.

Both the formal policies of a government or an NGO and the informal policies of a household may address gender directly, indirectly, or not at all. Policies may be "gender blind," which means that they are blind to gender differences between men, women, boys, and girls in the allocation of roles and resources. A "gender neutral" policy identifies and makes use of differences in gender but does not seek to change a gender role. An NGO policy would be gender-neutral if it were, for example, to include women on the monitoring committee of a child development center, because women have the socially assumed role of caregiver. "Gender specific" policies and programs identify practical needs specific to a man, woman, boy, or girl and his or her gender role, but do not seek to change that role or his or her degree of influence in society. An example is income generation activities for women. Finally, "gender redistributive" policies intend to transform existing gender relations. Gender redistributive policies can strategically target both women and men or one group specifically by trying to change gender roles, access to resources, and allocation of power and responsibilities between men and women in society in order to create a more balanced relationship between men and women. An example is a law granting women and girls the right to inherit property.

Gender mainstreaming can also occur at the organizational level. Rao and Kelleher argue that there are several approaches to gender mainstreaming within an organization. These include a more formal "gender infrastructure" approach and an informal process of organizational behavior and attitude change.[5] The "gender infrastructure" approach requires that organizations adapt their internal policies by increasing numbers of female workers and managers and creating a position of a gender coordinator. This approach gives formal structure to change, but may not lead to attitude changes within the organization or changes in program design. The "organizational change" approach involves organizational development through gender training and management support. This approach may create the attitude and behavior change needed to change institutions. Rao and Kelleher believe that these approaches, while difficult to sustain without high levels of commitment from organization leadership, can provide a strong base for changes in programming.[6] The present study adopts this framework in the analysis of the participating NGOs' gender mainstreaming and organizational change strategies and their program impacts on institutional and social change among recipient populations.

METHODOLOGY

This study is based on literature reviews of feminist and gender mainstreaming theory and NGO policies, and field research on local NGO policies and programs that are using gender mainstreaming strategies.

Researchers collaborated with 10 Indian NGOs in the three districts that were most affected in the state of Tamil Nadu: Kanniyakumari, Cuddalore, and Nagapattinam. The researchers tried to create a balance between NGOs with men and women as leaders: four of the 10 NGOs have women leadership. Participating NGOs were asked to facilitate the visit of the research team to what they considered their best example of a project that has incorporated gender mainstreaming techniques.

In addition to documenting good NGO projects and practices, the researchers held more than 150 focus group discussions with different groups of women, men, adolescent girls, and the marginalized transgender group known as Aravanis across 45 villages in the areas served by the NGOs in order to identify issues that are important to them. Group discussions focused on access to NGO projects and project outcomes within communities. Discussions also touched on issues falling outside of NGO projects, which gave the researchers insight into what has already been achieved toward the goal of gender equality and what has yet to be addressed, thereby identifying the potential for future action. The researchers also conducted semi-structured individual interviews whenever they were deemed useful.

The study's primary focus was on documentation of NGO programs that work toward changing gender norms and values in communities. Although data on the internal process of organizational change was limited, an analysis of these methods is presented in the findings. Furthermore, the study focused on populations in the fishing sector that are served by the NGOs selected to participate. This limited the populations to which the researchers had access, and other occupational sectors and communities not served by local NGOs would likely present unique issues. Finally, while the term "gender mainstreaming" refers to women, men, girls, and boys, this study focused primarily on females.

Sharing the study findings with participating NGOs is an integral component of the research process. Thus, each NGO was briefed with feedback from the research team on its gender mainstreaming practices and on other issues that community informants felt should be addressed.

KEY FINDINGS

Examples of NGO Gender Mainstreaming at the Programmatic Level

The response to the tsunami offers an opportunity to investigate how rebuilding after disasters may provide unique openings in communities for social change. This section applies the Rao and Kelleher framework to outline strategies to mainstream gender in NGO relief, rehabilitation, and reconstruction programs and agendas. The analysis focuses on both the potentially positive and the potentially unintended negative impacts of intervention on local populations and on whether each program addresses the practical and strategic gender needs of women. Although the NGOs that were part of the study have not formally adopted any one model of gender mainstreaming, all demonstrate attempts to implement gender-sensitive policies and programs. At the

implementation level, the NGOs are challenging institutional norms and values, focusing on target groups of vulnerable populations, and engaging in long-term planning and learning.

Gender-Sensitive Relief and Distribution

The identification of the appropriate type of relief and the method of distribution are two parts of an assistance strategy that uses a gender analysis to meet the needs of women and girls while also addressing structural gender inequality.

Some of the participating NGOs delivered gender-sensitive materials such as sanitary napkins and emergency contraception for women and girls, and condoms for men, as well as gender- and age-appropriate clothing, such as undergarments. Some apportioned ration amounts according to identified need or to the likelihood that someone would be neglected by his or her family or community. Accordingly, elderly people, women with disabilities, widows, unmarried women, and single women with children received larger or individual rations depending on their situation. Finally, some NGOs provided goods and services to reduce the amount of household labor for women and girls, by providing cooking facilities and utensils, for example, or cleaning villages and homes after people began returning to their communities from camps.

One effective way for a local NGO to determine whom to assist and the type and amount of aid to provide people following disasters was by collaborating or partnering with a community women's organization in relief preparation and distribution. In some cases, local women's organizations conducted their own needs analyses or surveys to create a detailed database to use to cross-check distribution lists prepared by other community institutions or leadership that might not have included the community's most vulnerable members.[7] A comparison of these extensive lists allowed NGOs and community groups both to identify excluded people and groups, and also to identify what kinds of materials were most suitable for a specific individual or household.

In some cases, the NGOs enabled women's organizations to direct the distribution of relief materials or services. Empowering women's groups to distribute aid challenges the traditionally male-dominated religious or political institutions that have been known to discriminate against some populations. Over half of the NGOs studied either distributed materials directly or partnered with community groups and empowered them to conduct the distribution. Women's organizations directed procurement of goods and trucks for distribution, and NGOs paid members to package materials. Once groups distributed materials, NGOs said, it was important to recheck to ensure that no one from the original assessment had been excluded. NGOs provided funding and logistical support to women's groups during such operations and supported groups if they met any resistance within the community.

Overall, informants reported that these strategies were more inclusive of most marginalized groups and were efficient because they enabled many groups to pool resources during distribution. These partnerships also made women's groups aware of their organizational capacities, thereby increasing their skills and encouraging them to take on more projects within the community. This process demonstrated that it is possible to make emergency response both effective and transformative.

Targeting vulnerable populations

In addition to the important work of providing relief to those who were excluded from mainstream distribution channels, some participating NGOs and community organizations targeted vulnerable populations with specific programs once they completed a gender-sensitive needs assessment. Vulnerable groups included socio-economically marginalized groups, like religious minorities, girls, single mothers, pregnant women, and the elderly. One example of how to target these populations and challenge preferential treatment for boys was a program run by one NGO that gave educational materials exclusively to daughters of single or poor mothers, to provide incentives for the mothers to keep the girls in school. Another organization created support groups for adolescent girls where they could discuss and learn about reproductive health issues and trauma from the disaster. Still another program sought to combat the neglect of elderly populations and provide for their livelihood needs through the creation of "village elder care committees." These committees provided loans and group projects for the elderly and fostered community responsibility toward elderly care.

Challenging Cultural Norms While Supporting Livelihoods

Training women in new productive skills can have both direct and indirect effects on the gender and power relationships in the labor and service markets. One NGO trained women in masonry so that other NGOs could hire them to build houses. The women masons earned twice the wages they had formerly received from hauling loads on their heads – although male masons still earned more than women on one project. In the process of learning this new trade, the women were also taught numerical and measuring skills that will help them in other arenas. Other non-traditional skills training for men and women included English language and mobile phone servicing programs, which combine vocational training with linkages to recruitment agencies and other NGOs for future employment. Another project trained women to fix hand pumps, making them more self-reliant, allowing them to save money on repairs, and transforming perceptions about the kind of work women can do. An unintended positive impact of these interventions was that both women and men realized the importance of having more skilled workers within the community, both to save money and because better employment opportunities mean higher wages. Although many women still typically receive a lower hourly wage than men, all but one participating NGO paid equal wages to women and men in housing construction and food-for-work projects.

In the region studied, men own most of the valuable assets such as homes and boats, but participating NGOs challenged this pattern, too. One key finding from the study is that rehabilitation policies can seriously discriminate against women when high-value assets such as fishing boats (typically owned by men) are replaced according to pre-disaster ownership. To break the male monopoly on ownership of highly valued productive assets, one organization gave boats to women's community groups, which the women then rented to their husbands or sons. Although the women faced potentially violent opposition from some men and community leaders, the NGO made it clear that the boats would only be available if they were collectively owned by women's groups. Community leaders eventually came to accept the arrangement. The ownership of assets has enhanced women's socio-economic position in the family and community, and women have reported that they are more involved in decision-making within the household and are more active in formerly male-dominated public spaces for fishing.

Other NGO projects directly challenged exclusive male control over access to markets. Some of the successful projects involved collaborative business efforts between men and women, such as rental of boats or vehicles. (Although some of the assets were owned by women, men protested less if they were also involved in the business. At times, men earned marginally higher wages than women did in these enterprises, apparently to avoid conflict in the families.[8]) In one case, an NGO helped Dalit men and women gain access to fish markets from which they were previously excluded. With some capital investments and training after the tsunami and their own pre-tsunami contacts and experience, this group of Dalits (formerly known as "Untouchables") was able to gain some control of a market previously run by elites, and one woman eventually took over management of the market finances, which was unprecedented. Other successful projects involved giving start-up grants to women for vending or service businesses, since they previously lacked the capital to buy materials and begin their trade. One project in which a women's group received a vehicle became self-sustaining, and as profits increased because of the time they saved by using the vehicle, the women made plans to buy another vehicle. Relations also improved with men and husbands as women's economic contributions and mobility increased. Although women's work burden has increased at times, so have their satisfaction and independence, as they have expanded their economic independence, developed their leadership skills, and increased their levels of self-sufficiency and security.

Some projects of the local NGOs expanded women's livelihood options through micro-credit and other innovative schemes. In Tamil Nadu state, many of the rotating-fund micro-finance projects target vulnerable populations and encourage sharing resources. In one case where communities faced periodic food shortages and had trouble obtaining food on credit, an NGO gave rice to a community group that then lent the rice to families on a flexible repayment schedule. Women manage the lending program because their community trusts them to be fair and meticulous, and community leaders intervene in cases of unacceptable default.[9] This relationship with community leadership can expand women's roles in public life. Another program accurately identified local market demand and paired distribution of livestock with access to farming land, so that women could grow fodder for their livestock and sell extra fodder on the market. Women who received goats repaid the loans with the animals' offspring, rather than incurring monetary debt.

Yet changes in economic relationships need to be supported by overall shifts in cultural attitudes toward women. One way to foster cultural change is to create new spaces for common public action. Some NGOs formed trade associations of men and women.[10] These associations allow men and women across socio-economic levels to work together on issues of human security and livelihoods. Organizing women on cooperative principles strengthens their presence in the market and increases their negotiating power. This also legitimizes women's roles as farmers or laborers because it ushers women into formerly male-dominated public spaces. Vocational education classes can also be sites of change, where men and women learn new skills together and where a new culture of gender relationships can develop. In these affordable classes, young people expand their social networks, interact more equally and freely, and discuss important social issues; the classes also cater to the emerging aspirations of a young generation with courses in computers and technology. Finally, one NGO created children's councils that mirrored community and religious leadership structures, where children could discuss issues that were important to them. The NGO reported that parental resistance to the collaboration between boys and girls in common activities is declining.

Fostering change in men's and women's roles and rights in the home is more difficult, yet not impossible. Some women's groups have lobbied for men to take part in community and household activities usually carried out by women, such as street cleaning. A few projects address the problem of alcoholism,[11] the impact of alcohol abuse on family life, and the relationship of alcoholism to gender-based violence.[12] Participating NGOs support awareness-raising campaigns run by women's groups, and NGOs also work directly with men's groups on microcredit and housing projects to combat alcohol abuse. Membership in the associations is contingent on reducing or stopping alcohol consumption. NGOs ask wives to verify whether their husbands are drinking, in which case disciplinary measures may follow. NGOs have reported that these approaches may reduce men's alcohol consumption while also raising their awareness about gender issues and offering them alternatives to drinking so they can better provide for their families.

Learning

Some NGOs emphasized the need to document projects and collect data in order to design better and more appropriate programs while preparing for future disasters. Even modest reporting on training and casework can provide reference materials for effective monitoring of changes over time, and will help determine which issues to work on in the future. Documentation and research might also help community groups and NGOs prepare and plan for future disasters, by clarifying which populations are vulnerable and identifying new risks that arise after a disaster. By developing research and data-collection skills, organizations will be able to conduct needs assessments more quickly in the event of another disaster. Finally, having available and relevant data gives NGOs the legitimacy to participate in state-level discussions to lobby for necessary changes in relief policies.[13]

Examples of Gender Mainstreaming at the Organizational Level

Gender Infrastructure

With a few exceptions, most of the NGOs that participated in this study lack an explicit gender policy, gender planning frameworks, a gender budgeting process, or gender program monitoring indicators. While the majority of NGOs interviewed have a tsunami emergency program plan, only two have a gender policy, although many are presently developing such a document. However, in many cases an implicit understanding of gender and gender analysis informs programs and guides program implementation. The participating NGOs are taking steps to build or expand the gender infrastructure within their organization. One strategy is to hire more women - especially those from the communities the organization serves. One organization considers non-professional work experience, such as life experience or inherent gender-analysis capabilities, when evaluating women candidates. This enables women to compete for positions even though they may have less formal work history or education than their male counterparts. Another organization helps women who work for them continue their education by covering some of the costs. Finally, one NGO hired a Muslim woman activist as a consultant to work with Muslim women communities because the organization had previously been unable to access these women for cultural reasons. These recruitment and employment strategies have increased women's participation and retention in the formal workforce and have improved the quality of programs that NGOs can offer.

While the gender balance of staff can vary from one organization to another, most organizations now have roughly equal numbers of male and female staff, and in some cases women outnumber men. However, few organizations have women in managerial positions where they could make strategic decisions about program development and implementation. Many of the participating NGOs have a gender balance on their boards of directors, and a few have grassroots activist women on their boards. Only one of the 10 participating organizations, however, has a gender coordinator position.

Yet despite the varying degrees of formal progress within organizations, NGO informants reported that having more women on staff has increased those women's mobility within the community, as well as their confidence levels and status within their families. In addition, those NGOs received greater community acceptance. As wage earners in times of economic hardship, women have found new respect within their families and have overcome the initial resistance shown by husbands and traditional community leaders to women working in professional positions.

Organizational Development

All of the participating organizations have focused on addressing the practical gender needs of women, while interventions in seven of 10 organizations have also attempted to change the power relationships between men and women. Four of those seven organizations are working with men directly.

While these findings are promising, expanding the informal aspects of organizational development by strengthening the skills of employees in gender analysis and changing attitudes is a continuing need. Two of the participating organizations periodically hold a gender training session facilitated by experts. These participatory sessions help employees reflect on the gains and gaps in mainstreaming gender within the organization and its programs. Other training sessions cover reproductive health and women's human rights. Most organizations consider trainings as a tool for building and strengthening awareness of gender issues, and some are able to share the resulting knowledge with communities through meetings and street plays.

CHALLENGES AND FACILITATING FACTORS TO GENDER MAINSTREAMING DURING DISASTERS

NGOs reported that the presence of certain factors support gender mainstreaming, while their absence can greatly impede progress. Above all, an organization's leadership is critical in identifying the appropriate groups to target, providing staff training, and promoting innovative programming ideas. Without leaders who understand gender analysis and mainstreaming, there is little chance of large-scale organizational or programmatic change.

Awareness on the part of donors is also extremely important. Women-friendly projects can and need to begin immediately after a disaster, so the speed with which donors provide funds is critical. But NGOs carrying out programs with the potential to alter gender power relations require that the funding be long-term, as well. A short-term livelihoods training program, for example, will have a much greater impact if there is also funding available over time for investment in women's businesses that build on their newly acquired skills. Conversely, lack of donor commitment to gender mainstreaming can be a liability to such efforts.

Finally, researchers observed that the presence of an active women's movement in a community greatly increases their ability to advocate for gender policies in the public disaster-management discourse.

A gender analysis of field information can reveal the potential negative impact that well-intentioned gender mainstreaming projects can have on women if not properly implemented. For example, projects aimed at improving the lives of women may inadvertently increase their workloads as they gain new roles in the community and marketplace with no relief from their household labor.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE ANAWIM TRUST RESEARCHERS

This study found that local Indian NGOs have developed many positive and effective strategies for gender mainstreaming within their programs and organizations during the tsunami response. Several strategies and recommendations could be adopted by other organizations globally in future disaster responses.

At the programmatic level:

- Collect comprehensive and context-specific data on vulnerable populations, such as unmarried women, sexual- or gender-orientation minorities (such as Aravanis), widows, men engaged in child care, elderly people engaged in productive activities, women with only female children, women caring for sick partners, women with disabilities, indigenous people, people living with HIV, pregnant women, and women living in violent situations.

- Strengthen women's collective empowerment through development of groups, skills training, and collective ownership of assets in order to increase women's capacity to participate in all aspects of disaster preparedness and management.

- Expand or support equitable access to and control over resources for women through asset transfers and skills training.

- Consider interventions besides microfinance programs for women. Projects that encourage women's representation in community leadership structures support sustainable shifts in attitudes towards women's empowerment. Where associations do not exist for vulnerable populations, NGOs can support them, and NGOs can encourage traditional leadership to accept women and marginalized men in leadership positions.

- Design integrated or vertical programming so that women are supported in their reproductive and productive work. [14] For example, business programs should include childcare components.

- Develop gender indicators and benchmarks to monitor implementation of programs and include a gender dimension to all components of project monitoring.

- Document successful programs and best practices or strategies or work with community groups and activists on documentation. Use documentation to promote gender-focused research and evaluation of programs and on advocacy in conjunction with women's movements. Share these findings with other NGOs, especially on newer issues like alcohol use and gender-based violence, where less information is available.

At the organizational level:

- Develop and implement a gender policy that addresses the specific needs of women and men on staff. An effective gender policy would include woman- and

family-friendly employee policies that would attract and retain women on staff, such as offering flexible work schedules and expanding the criteria for evaluating and recruiting women candidates to include life experiences as well as professional work experience. Staff policies should also serve to democratize the workplace in order to give women opportunities to participate in policy development and attain managerial positions.

- Promote and encourage positive changes in behavior and attitudes about gender within organizations by supporting training programs that raise awareness about gender among staff and strengthen their gender-analysis skills. Training on gender analysis not only will benefit staff relations and women's position within the organization, but also will mean that staff are accurately evaluating programs and their impact on gender relations and improving overall effectiveness.

- Consult with local feminist groups in order to build alliances with the larger women's movement to increase learning and to advance the gender equality agenda.

- Create a position of a gender coordinator, where possible, to lead an organization's gender mainstreaming process.

- Develop and support leadership that strongly advocates for these strategies.

CONCLUSIONS

Few of the impacts of disaster are gender-neutral, and organizations will be more effective and equitable if they employ a gender analysis in relief, rehabilitation, and reconstruction policies and processes. If organizations fail to mainstream gender in their programs, they risk perpetuating pre-disaster social vulnerabilities and exclusions rooted in unequal power relationships that are based on gender. This study of gender mainstreaming during the tsunami response shows that it is possible after disasters to rebuild in such a way as to empower women and marginalized groups to take on new roles in their communities. NGOs wishing to begin this complex process of social and organizational change have a variety of policy options. In many cases, they will benefit from the input of grassroots women activists, who likely are driving change in their communities and who may in turn need the NGO as a platform for wider action. Changing gender norms, attitudes, and behaviors within an organization in support of greater equality may create opportunities for bold action in its programs. When organizations can guide changes in community institutions, one result may be a stronger political will to address complex and contentious issues such as gender-based violence and reproductive rights during disasters. Other areas for future research about gender issues during and after disasters include alcohol use and men, the gender division of labor, prostitution, housing, working with men and traditional leadership, public policy regarding disaster prevention and response, identification of vulnerable populations and the skills needed for disaster response, and the relationship between gender, HIV and AIDS, and disasters. It is also important to document the best practices, improvements, and challenges in current relief programs and strategies adopted by women's community groups to work with traditional leadership. Many of these issues are largely absent from the reconstruction agenda of many participating NGOs, yet they directly affect women's dignity and security. The horror and destruction of the tsunami and other disasters should never be minimized. At the same time, the subsequent breakdown in control over social structures and norms also creates opportunities to engage with men and women on critical issues of gender equality.

NOTES

1 International Labor Organization, 2006.

2 EKTA Resource Centre for Women, 2005 and Chew, 2005.

3 ECOSOC, 1997.

4 Platform for Action, Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 1995.

5 Rao and Kelleher, 2003.

6 Ibid.

7 One organization reported that it used churches to distribute materials and then switched to direct distribution after it checked and found that the churches had excluded some single women, girls, and widows.

8 Discussion with the head of PURA on unequal wages. Though ownership of assets by women were accepted by both men and women, the move for dividing the income equally between husband and wives was not accepted by women themselves as they feared the possibility of domestic conflict.

9 One NGO discussed the need to find alternative conflict resolution mechanisms among women in order to expand the political activity of women and avoid relying on traditional leaders.

10 This suggests that the disaster was an impetus for change and that people were open to changes during the long effort to rebuild.

11 Informants perceive alcohol abuse to be increasing in prevalence as a coping mechanism for men since the tsunami.

12 TNTRC and CDOT, "Alcohol Abuse among the Coastal Communities in Chennai District," Chennai, 2006.

13 This study found that advocacy is mostly done by women-led organizations.

14 Handy et al, 2006.

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The Anawim Trust was established in 1993 by a group of people concerned about rural communities facing severe marginalization in the Tuticorin District of Tamil Nadu State. The organization works to empower rural communities to exercise their rights and to obtain greater access to natural resources, and thus to have greater control over their lives and livelihoods. Anawim works closely with women and children and targets the poorest of the poor and the Dalit (formerly "untouchable") community. Given lack of education and access to information, these groups are often the least able to benefit from government services. Anawim works in such areas as health, education, income generation, skills training, and helping communities protect and manage coastal ecosystems.

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Oxfam International is a confederation of 13 organizations working together in more than 100 countries to find lasting solutions to poverty and injustice. With many of the causes of poverty global in nature, the 13 affiliate members of Oxfam International believe they can achieve greater impact through their collective efforts.

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