

Stories of Impact

A series highlighting achievements in disaster risk management

Increasing Women's Role in Disaster Risk Management Across India



REGION: SOUTH ASIA
FOCUS: INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY RESILIENCE
COUNTRY: INDIA



RESULTS:

- More than 300 cyclone shelters have been built across 10 states (out of 900 planned), and 226 Cyclone Shelter Management and Maintenance Committees (CSMMCs) have been formed at the village level, comprising both women and men.
- To provide search, rescue, and first aid support to each shelter, 149 village-level task forces were formed from youth volunteers, with about 50% participation of women in these groups.
- In Andhra Pradesh, effective models of ownership have been formed with Velugu –women self-groups that manage and maintain the planned 222 multi-purpose cyclone shelters.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

Between 2013 and 2015, India experienced more than six major natural disasters across six states, including floods, landslides, drought, and cyclones. With millions of people – both women and men – affected, in addition to an unprecedented scale of financial loss, community preparedness in disaster risk management (DRM) became a priority for the country.

To scale up DRM efforts along India's 7500 km coastline, the Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (GFDRR) and the World Bank have supported the National Cyclone Risk Mitigation Project (NCRMP) in two phases, as well as the Tamil Nadu and Puducherry Coastal Disaster Risk Reduction Project (CDRRP). Together, these projects reduce the population's vulnerability to climate and disaster risk by building their DRM capacity, in part, by ensuring equal participation of women and men in disaster planning and response.



GFDRR
Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery



WORLD BANK GROUP

CONTEXT:

India's 1 billion-plus population is exposed to a wide range of natural hazards. Furthermore, poor economic and social conditions, fragile human settlements, unsafe building practices, and low awareness make these populations highly vulnerable to climate and disaster risk. Approximately 5,700 km of the India's 7,500 km coastline is exposed to severe cyclones, and an estimated 40% of the total population lives within 100 km of the coast — making the coastal impacts of disasters all the more devastating.

Women and men differ in their vulnerability to disasters. Evidence shows that when it comes to deaths in disasters, women tend to be affected significantly more than men. For example, in the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, 70% of deaths in the coastal state of Tamil Nadu, India, were that of women. Moreover, women's low participation in DRM efforts only accentuates their vulnerability and ability to assume leading DRM roles. In India, traditionally women are perceived only as homemakers, consequently they are often left out of the planning process including disaster preparedness. Hence, women tend to have less knowledge about 'what to do' in the event of a disaster and have less opportunity to share their needs or priorities.

APPROACH:

The NCRMP and CDRRP have brought gender considerations into capacity building, early warning systems, and risk mitigation initiatives in the following ways:

- Building community DRM capacity — equally of women and men — through information sharing, mock drills, and informal consultations that increase awareness of response during a disaster. An extensive network of disaster management village volunteers and task forces have been formed that have equal female representation.
- Creating models of community participation and ownership around cyclone mitigation infrastructure by forming CSMMCs through community collaboration with local governments. Special attention is given to ensure equal representation of women in managing the shelters.
- Forming village-level task forces to involve community youth in search and rescue, first aid, shelter management, evacuation and early warning for each shelter. Women make up 50% of these groups between the age of 18–35 years.

NEXT STEPS:

Building on the lessons learned from the NCRMP and the CDRRP, the Government of India is working with all the coastal states to replicate these models of community participation and ownership around critical infrastructure. Emphasis will continue on promoting community-led disaster preparedness initiatives — which are indispensable in disaster response — simultaneously encouraging both women and men to actively participate in decision making and risk reduction planning.

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*ALL MONETARY VALUES IN USD



LESSONS LEARNED:

Inclusive community engagement is critical for risk mitigation. Involving the entire community (men, women, youth, girls, and boys) in risk identification and management not only enables gender-equitable disaster preparedness and plans but also provides a sense of collective responsibility for mitigating vulnerability and risk.

A robust, continuous communication and outreach strategy promotes a community “safety culture” that empowers both women and men. Only when both women and men know what to do before, during, and after a disaster does a success story such as in Odisha State's becomes possible: its inclusive communication strategy and responsive community helped enable over 99% reduction in fatalities from Cyclone Phailin in 2013 compared to the Odisha “super cyclone” of 1999 which was of similar magnitude.