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Diese Stellungnahme wird von den Mitgliedsorganisationen gemäß ihren satzungsgemäßen Aufgaben getragen.

Aide-Mémoire

61st Session of the UN Commission on Human Rights
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Gender and Natural Disasters / South-East Asia

The gendered impacts of natural disasters

Introduction

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) already suggested in 2000 that gender is an important dimension within disasters such as the Indian Ocean Tsunamis. It has been argued that vulnerability to natural disasters and their consequences is gendered and socially constructed, meaning that women and men face different challenges during natural disasters because their roles in society have been constructed differently. Therefore gender inequality plays an important role in the level of vulnerability to natural disasters and their consequences. Women are more vulnerable during disasters because they have less access to resources, are victims of the gendered division of labour, and they are the primary caregivers to children, the elderly and the disabled.

Concerning Indonesia, we have to emphasize that women have been exposed to gender based violence (gbv) and exploitation for the last 15 years by the Indonesian army before the disaster occurred. The increase of gbv during periods of war, crisis and natural disasters and in the aftermath has become a well-known fact but is still not considered as crucial for the analysis of protection, prevention and participation of women in emergency and reconstruction and peace-building efforts- neither by the local nor by the international decision-makers.

Furthermore, recognizing the important role that gender plays in disaster management and relief, it is alarming that gender concerns often get pushed to the background in the event of a natural disaster. There is an obvious need directly after the disaster has occurred to provide basics to victims such as food, clothing, shelter and fresh water, regardless of gender. Given that disasters such as earthquakes, floods, droughts, hurricanes and landslides will always occur, however, it is imperative to ensure that a gender perspective is included in all natural disaster management programmes so that the relief efforts are able to properly address needs and concerns for both women and men.

Also in Sri Lanka the structural violence against women plays an important role. (...) "From women residents in camps, we heard stories of concern regarding their safety and the safety of their children. There were some stories of attempted molestation and coercion by adult males, including some who were in charge of the camp. In one camp, which was served by a temporary electricity connection, women complained that at night someone would trigger off a power failure and in the dark, men would enter the areas of the camp where the women were sleeping and grope their bodies. Tsunami survivors also had stories of being groped and touched while they were being rescued. In the second week after the tsunami, Policemen had appeared in the camps in the south while members of the STF were visible in camps in the east, providing security to the inhabitants. However, it was clear that they had

no specific training in the area of violence against women, and were primarily concerned with maintaining discipline within the camp. Among their key activities was keeping outsiders out of the camp at night and preventing men under the influence of drugs and liquor from entering the camp. Some of them were willing to accept complaints, while others maintained that this was not within their mandate. It was clear that they had not received any clear orders regarding possible interventions and responses to complaints of violence made by women and children. In addition, women complained of the problems they faced due to the insensitivity of camp officials who were almost always men. In many of the camps visited by us, we found men in charge of maintaining lists, distributing rations and donations and meeting with visitors. In Tangalle, the Police had issued a notice calling on Camp Committees to be formed as a response to complaints they said they had received about incidents of indiscipline and violence against women in the camps in their area. However, they clearly stated that two *men* from among the community should be selected for this task.” (2.press release, COALITON FOR ASSISTING TSUNAMI AFFECTED WOMEN (CATAW) from 15 January 2005).

This means that women are excluded from mobilising survival resources and protection from gbv and rehabilitation. They are more likely to be over-represented in the unemployed and violence-affected following a disaster, and overburdened with domestic responsibilities leaving them with less freedom to pursue sources of income to alleviate their economic burdens. It is most often the women who goes without food in order to feed their families during a disaster, also.

The *European Parliament Resolution on Women and Conflict Resolution (2001)* called for including women’s perspectives and increasing their participation in conflict resolution and peace-building processes – the hard-core of international politics.

The *European Parliament Resolution on Women in Decision-Making (2000)* foresees that in reconstruction efforts, a gender analysis must be automatic in the planning and practice of external interventions. That means that more women are recruited to diplomatic services. More women should be nominated to international diplomatic assignments and senior positions with the UN and the percentage of women in delegations to the national, regional and international meetings concerned with peace and security should be increased. According to the resolution at least 40 per cent of women should hold posts in reconciliation, peacekeeping, peace enforcement, peacebuilding and conflict prevention.

The *UNSC Resolution 1325 (2000)* mandates the protection of, and respect for, the human rights of women and girls, and calls for the increased representation of women in decision-making for the prevention, management and resolution of conflict and peace processes. It also calls for increasing the number of women

appointed as special representatives. Other provisions include support of local women's peace initiatives and respect for international law applicable to the rights and protection of women and girls. It calls for adopting special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, and calls for ensuring that Security Council missions take gender considerations and rights of women into account, including through consultation with local and international women's groups.

Furthermore, the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)*, adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly defines discrimination against women as, "...any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field. CEDAW has frequently been referred to as a bill of human rights for women.

However, looking at the actual situation, be it in developing countries that live in peace or in war-torn and natural disaster-affected countries where our organizations work, we have to say that these rights are far from being fulfilled. Indeed, the human, social and political rights of women and girls that form an integral part of the:

- European Parliament Resolution on Women and Conflict Resolution(2001)
- European Parliament Resolution on Women in Decision-Making (2000)
- UNSC Resolution 1325 (2000)
- CEDAW (1979)
- Beijing-Declaration (1995)

are under threat in the tsunami-affected countries for very different reasons:

Abhorrent acts of rape, sexualized violence and harassment against women in areas of war are well documented and analysed. Similar events in the aftermath of natural disasters are often overlooked or receive scant attention. One of the mayor concerns expressed in the *Beijing-Declaration (1995)* is that women and girls are deterred from using basic health services and other resources because of sexual and gender based violence, including physical and psychological abuse, trafficking in women and girls, and other forms of abuse and sexual exploitation placing girls and women at high risk of physical and mental trauma, disease and unwanted pregnancy. Very concretely spoken there have already been documented incidents of rape and sexual molestation in Sri Lanka during rescue efforts after the Tsunami, rapes in refugee

camps in Sri Lanka and reports of human traffickers taking advantage of women and children's vulnerability in Aceh.

Traffickers and rapists prey on the vulnerable without adequate protection, therefore the survivors of the Tsunami are easy targets, especially women and children. The Women and Media Collective women's group in Sri Lanka have received reports of repeated incidents of rape, gang rape, molestation and physical abuse of women and girls in the course of unsupervised rescue operations during the first days and while resident in temporary shelters. In addition to these issues, women are often the victims of domestic and sexual violence following a natural disaster.

A collective of women's rights groups in Sri Lanka has issued a written appeal for public attention to "serious issues concerning the safety and well-being of women which have not been addressed in so far in relief efforts." Vital reproductive health services must be a priority. In any displaced population, approximately 25 percent of women of childbearing age will be pregnant, while some will be close to giving birth and need clean delivery materials. In addition, 15 percent of pregnant women will suffer from unforeseen complications of pregnancy and childbirth, necessitating their access to life-saving emergency obstetric care. The five-party group, which includes the *Sri Lanka Women's NGO Forum and the Women's Alliance for Peace and Democracy*, expressed appreciation towards international aid efforts, but urged that these efforts be "refocused" to address violence against women and the needs of vulnerable communities, such as pregnant or lactating women and unaccompanied children.

medica mondiale and the Women's Security Council call on the Commission to:

- Urge the UN and International community and the member states that the Indonesian military must not obtain the coordination of the refugee camps and rescue measures in Aceh. International fund should not be canalized to the Indonesian military as well.
- Call upon member states to urge the Indonesian government to stick to their cease-fire agreement and start with peace-talks.
- Ensure that all operational plans at EU and UN levels for the rehabilitation and long-term reconstruction of the tsunami-hit regions must include the *United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)* steps to ensure the protection and security of women left destitute by the disaster. These are:
 1. Special facilities in temporary refuge shelters for unaccompanied women and children, including separate sleeping areas, bathing facilities and

- latrines – as initial measures to protect women from gender-based-violence.
2. Steps to ensure that women and girls do not need to venture out unprotected to gather food, clothing, water, cooking fuel and other essentials.
 3. The arrest and prosecution of the perpetrators of violent attacks against women and children.
 4. Immediate psycho-social trauma treatment and care for the victims of sexualized and other forms of violence on all levels on emergency-relief.
- Subjects of importance to women's health have not been adequately researched and women's health research often lacks funding in natural disaster situations. Up to now, hardly strategies have been developed which analyse the direct physical, psychical and social consequences of sexualised, (post-) war, natural disaster and domestic violence. The commission must press member states to systematically collect, disaggregate and analyse statistical data on health by sex, age and socio-economic status. Only then, in combination with adequate funding and staff qualification, an adequate gender-sensitive treatment through the data-based analysis will be possible.
 - To urge upon EU foreign affairs, development, humanitarian and health related actions in the operational EU action plan for the Tsunami stricken region are formulated with careful consideration of gender equality and mainstreaming. This includes ensuring that women, both local actors and foreign support workers, are placed in key decision making positions and that their active participation at all levels of reconstruction and long-term development is guaranteed.
 - In upholding the international obligations to women in conflict as outlined in *UN Security Council Resolution 1325 of 31 October 2000*, it is imperative that agencies working in disaster areas not only provide protection to vulnerable women, but also recognise that women are central to the rehabilitation and reconstruction of their communities. Both emergency relief and long-term strategies for community development should recognise the particular needs of women, as well as ensuring that their concerns, perspectives and solutions are included in the process of drawing up and implementing local recovery plans.
 - To urge member states and the UN to ensure that at least 40 per cent of women should hold posts in reconciliation, peacekeeping , peace enforcement,

peacebuilding and conflict prevention according to *the European Parliament Resolution on Gender and Peacebuilding (2000)*.

- Urge member states to implement fully the *UN-Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security* in natural disasters areas as well. Especially training on human rights violations against women and girls, on trauma and needs for psycho-social support are vital for medical staff, rescue-teams, military and civilian staff. Without the recognition that emergency-staff needs sensitisation trainings, women and girls will be additionally traumatized and excluded from the support and health system. The European Union must do all it can to ensure that the women and children who survived the devastation do not fall prey to further human trauma including male violence.
- To call upon member states to establish women's trust funds to ensure that funds from international donations are channelled also to local women's organizations and local female relief helpers. It is vital to allocate resources and expertise to strengthen women's networks and ensure that their needs and realities are reflected in policies, practices, and resource allocations through the phases of relief, recovery, and development.
- To call on Member States and the European Commission to ensure the full and authoritative inclusion of women's voices and knowledge, both within the present tsunami-affected regions and at the international level to nominate more women to international diplomatic assignments and senior positions with the UN and other International entities involved with Disaster recovery, and sharply increase the percentage of women in delegations to national, regional and international meetings concerned with post-Natural disaster reconstruction, both for South Asia and the East African littoral now and on all similar occasions in the future.