

TOWARDS AN INCLUSIVE DISASTER RISK REDUCTION MANAGEMENT PROCESS

by RJ Marco Lorenzo C. Parcon

The United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) has pointed out that gender inequalities constrain the control of women and girls over important decisions that affect their lives and restrain their access to vital resources. Existing cultural beliefs and traditional gender norms limit the capacity and authority of women to decide on their own and contribute to society. Women could utilize their skills, enhance their potentials and contribute to the DRRM process, but traditional gender norms hinder them from doing so.

Ascribing to these traditional gender norms that incapacitate women is just one of the many reasons why a gender perspective must be incorporated in disaster risk reduction efforts and in post-disaster revitalization processes. A gender perspective will not only debunk traditional gender norms that are harmful to the development of women and the whole community, but more importantly, it will also recognize the different vulnerabilities and capacities of men and women, thus allowing for a more gender equal environment. This recognition will also help communities address these vulnerabilities and further strengthen their capacities to fully prepare for disasters and enhance the post-disaster revitalization process.

The international community's emphasis on the importance of gender equality are reflected in various international declarations, conventions and commitments. The *Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)*, stresses that states parties to the Convention must incorporate the principle of equality of men and women in their respective legal system, abolish all discriminatory laws, and adopt appropriate ones to further promote equality. Moreover, the *Beijing Platform for Action's (BPfA)* framework aims to reduce women vulnerabilities and to remove all obstacles to women's active participation both in the public and private setting through the utilization of the principle of shared power and responsibility. BPfA recognizes the field of environment as one of the 12 critical areas of concern where women must be given more opportunities.

According to UNWomen, while women are among the most affected by disasters and climate change, their voices are often unheard and unrecognized in environmental planning and management. The *Sendai Framework for DRR*, the outcome document of the Third World Conference on DRR, further echoes the importance of women's participation and collaboration with public institutions which are critical in ensuring the effectiveness DRR programs, plans and policies. The framework further proclaims that, indeed, DRR requires an *all-of-society engagement*. In order to do this, community members must be empowered, processes must be inclusive and accessible, and participation should be non-discriminatory. In this regard, it is important that a gender, age, disability and cultural perspective be integrated in policy formulation and implementation while also further empowering women and the youth.

The Philippines' Case

The 2015 World Economic Forum Gender Gap Index ranked the Philippines as seventh out of 145 countries with the highest chance of attaining gender equality in various fields ranging from economic participation to political representation. In addition, the Fifth Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) Progress Report of the Philippines noted that the Philippines has a high chance of achieving MDG 3 – promote gender equality and empower women.

With regard to DRRM, the Philippines has instituted Republic Act 10121, otherwise known as the Philippine Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act of 2010. RA 10121 explicitly states that disaster risk reduction and climate change measures employed by the government should be gender responsive, culturally sensitive and considerate of human rights. RA 10121 further provides that the early recovery and post-disaster needs assessment undergo a gender analysis. The Philippine Congressional Oversight Committee on Disaster Risk Reduction and Management is currently conducting a review and evaluation of the aforementioned Republic Act to further improve the mechanisms and principles that the law enshrines, and this is an opportunity to dialogue with legislators on the gender aspects of DRRM.

While the Philippines has been instituting various gender mainstreaming policies and activities both in the national and local levels, an [independent review of gender equality in DRRM processes of 2014 by Imelda Abarquez and Nancy Parreno](#) revealed that there are still communities and families where women experience gender-based discrimination and violence. The review also pointed out that while the Gender Gap Index and the MDGs Progress Reports are good indicators of improvements in the Philippines, more has to be done particularly on gender-based discrimination and violence at the local level. Moreover, it also stated that while the Philippines has good policies to ensure and promote women participation in the various DRRM and post-disaster rehabilitation initiatives, the implementation of these strategies must be monitored constantly.

“As DRR proponents would say, communities must build back better. This can only be done when the processes promote the principles of gender equality and inclusivity. In the formation and implementation of DRRM policies, a gender perspective must be utilized.”

In the 2014 Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) Manila Conference on DRRM, Philippine Senator Loren Legarda mentioned the accomplishments and progress made by the Philippines in enhancing women’s participation in DRRM activities. She further emphasized that it is important for women to be capacitated to respond after the onslaught of a disaster and also to be integrated into the overall DRRM strategy to take on key DRRM leadership roles. She stressed that the effective role of women in community-building must be recognized, encouraged and supported.

Towards a more inclusive DRRM process

The processes utilized by the state must be inclusive and must take into consideration the needs of all, regardless of sex. Traditional gender norms must be rejected. More often than not, instead of allowing each member of the community to be productive, these gender norms spawn gender discrimination and violence.

As DRR proponents would say, communities must *build back better*. This can only be done when the processes promote the principles of gender equality and inclusivity. In the formation and implementation of DRRM policies, a gender perspective must be utilized. A *whole of society inclusive approach* is truly vital – only when each and every member of the society is taken into consideration and when the DRRM process is inclusive. 🌸

RJ Marco Lorenzo C. Parcon is a Foreign Affairs Research Specialist with the Center for International Relations and Strategic Studies of the Foreign Service Institute.

CIRSS Commentaries is a regular short publication of the Center for International Relations and Strategic Studies (CIRSS) of the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) focusing on the latest regional and global developments and issues.

Mr. Parcon can be reached at rjcpcon@fsi.gov.ph

The views expressed in this publication are of the authors alone and do not reflect the official position of the Foreign Service Institute, the Department of Foreign Affairs and the Government of the Philippines.

The Center for International Relations and Strategic Studies (CIRSS) of the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) undertakes studies in support of the formulation, review, and dissemination of Philippine foreign policy. It also organizes conferences, roundtable discussions (RTD), lectures, and forums as channels for interaction, cooperation, and integration of the efforts of local and foreign experts from government, private and academic sectors on foreign policy issues and their domestic implications.

