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I am core Border Security Force Officer. I have successfully served in various capacities in extremely inhospitable and sensitive segments of International Border with Pakistan & Bangladesh, LoC and Internal Security duties in different parts of the Country. I joined the NDRF on deputation in 2020.

As Second in Command in the National Disaster Response Force stationed in Guwahati. I have dedicated 24 years of unblemished service, and have been awarded Police Medal for Meritorious Service, by President of India. I am currently pursuing a PhD in Disaster Management from the Centre of Disaster Management and Research at IIT Guwahati.

I have supervised disaster responses during significant incidents such as the coal mine incident in Krem Ule Village (Meghalaya), the boat capsizing in river Brahmaputra at Nimatighat (Jorhat), and a massive landslide in Tupul (Manipur).

Additionally, I have contributed to community capacity building through Community-Based Disaster Risk Reduction (CBDRR) techniques, including the creation of trained disaster response teams and conducting mock exercises. I have collaborated with various authorities and organizations to introduce new initiatives such as early warning alert systems to mitigate disaster impacts.

Gender-sensitive approach to Disaster Risk Reduction

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3.1. Introduction

Gender refers to the societal expectations and norms regarding the roles, behaviours, and attributes deemed appropriate for individuals based on their assigned sex at birth. (José Antonio Gutierrez & Gibbons, 2020). Recognizing the gender dynamics and implications of natural disasters and climate change is essential for effective disaster risk management, enabling communities and nations to build resilience. It's important to acknowledge that not all women, men, girls, and boys experience disasters and climate change impacts in the same way; differences exist within and between these groups, including individuals with disabilities, minorities, indigenous populations, the elderly, those with chronic illnesses, unaccompanied children, households headed by children or women, and widows (Lewis, 2016).

Gender perspectives provide valuable insights into various aspects of human life, including disaster preparedness and response (Valdes et al, 2009). In the past, women were often overlooked or portrayed solely as victims in disaster scenarios. Women are considered to be vulnerable, meek, shy and weaker section of society. However, recent

research highlights the unique abilities and advantages of women in disaster situations. Women tend to have a higher level of risk perception and maintain stronger community networks, enabling them to play a significant role in caring for victims and contributing to post-disaster recovery efforts (Yadav et al, 2021).

It is often assumed that gender studies are linked with female, concentrating primarily on female roles whereas the focus on male contribution are often terms as gender neutral information. Instead of assuming sensitive approach to gender analysis, we emphasis on relationship between "masculinity" and "femininity". Masculinity is a social construct necessarily related to notions of femininities and to often marginalised masculinities.

While men's contributions to disaster management may span various scales, including institutional and systemic levels, women's contributions are often observed at the community level. (Maobe, 2021) Despite recommendations from several studies, women in patriarchal societies are frequently viewed as assistants rather than leaders in disaster management tasks. Gender issues related to community-based disaster prevention are of concern in both less developed and developed countries. In less developed countries, women's input is crucial due to insufficient disaster prevention infrastructure, while in developed countries, there is a focus on gender mainstreaming and equality in disaster prevention efforts (Mehta, 2007).

3.2. What is a gender-responsive approach to DRR planning?

A gender-sensitive approach to Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) planning entails incorporating gender-based disparities and concerns

into the formulation of policies, strategies, plans, or programs, while actively promoting gender equality during their execution (Parkinson et al, 2018). Essentially, this involves conducting a thorough assessment of disaster risks that takes into account the influence of gender norms, roles, and inequalities on the vulnerability and resilience of individuals, both male and female (Tarnaala, 2016). Through gender analysis, a deeper insight is gained into the activities, assets, needs, and priorities of men and women, as well as the prevailing power dynamics.

Taking into account the distinct needs and priorities of men, women, boys, and girls when formulating Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) policies, plans, and programs is not only aligned with human rights principles but also makes economic sense (Lewis, 2016). So addressing gender inequalities and empowering women, DRR interventions can effectively meet the needs of both genders? This is a question to look upon. Moreover, adopting a gender-responsive approach offers a chance to enhance the pre-disaster environment by bolstering the capacities of men and women to mitigate risks and fostering more equitable social dynamics(Valdes et al, 2009). Ultimately, this approach can contribute to agricultural, economic, and social development.

It is important to ensure a gender-responsive approach in DRR processes and crucial to acknowledge the inherent social dimension of risk and vulnerability (Ciampi et al, 2011). This involves recognizing that men and women have different approach and perspectives regarding specific natural hazards, which should inform all activities related to DRR planning. Allocating resources within the planning budget to hire gender experts and to collect, analyze, and utilize sex-disaggregated data is essential (Smyth, 2012). Moreover,

efforts should be made to enhance the capacity of DRR practitioner in addressing gender equality through comprehensive training (Kadir,2021).

3.3. Gender Mainstreaming in Disaster Risk Management

Ensuring gender equality is integrated into the guiding principles of the DRR plan or policy involves committing to including women and men, particularly from marginalized socio-economic groups, in decision-making processes and action implementation (Kaur, 2020). It requires making a dedicated commitment to reducing the gender gap and empowering women by outlining specific actions to meet the diverse priorities of women and men in disaster response. Additionally, incorporating the vision of achieving equality between men and women of different ages to enhance their resilience within the plan is essential (Ginige et al., 2014). Addressing the needs of women and men within strategic actions involves involving women in local Disaster Risk Management (DRM) committees and related training to improve their access to early warning messages. Identifying stakeholders representing the perspectives of rural women and minority groups in institutional mechanisms for DRR planning and implementation is crucial (Kaur, 2020). Developing new agricultural practices through consultation with target communities to integrate local knowledge and cater to the specific needs of women and men to access resources, assets, and knowledge successfully is necessary. Considering the time use and existing workloads of men and women to prevent additional burdens, especially for women, is vital (Ginige et al, 2014). Designing gender-responsive measures to ensure that hard-to-reach groups, such as women and youth heads of households, have access to preparedness initiatives is imperative. Ensuring that gender-related work is part of the DRR Implementation

plan involves defining responsibilities for integrating gender issues into DRR activities, including gender specialists in teams or committees, monitoring progress with gender-sensitive indicators, allocating separate budget lines for gender-related actions, identifying gender-responsive communication methods, and conducting case studies to document the beneficiaries and identify good practices for future scaling.

For instance, in Sweden, even though the country is known for its high degree of gender equality awareness, female volunteers faced criticism when performing tasks traditionally assigned to men during disaster relief efforts. In Taiwan, despite significant progress in disaster prevention infrastructure development, there are still challenges related to insufficient resources for disaster prevention and relief. While Taiwan has actively promoted Community-Based Disaster Risk Management (CBDRM), gender issues are often overlooked by CBDRM professionals due to the country's high level of gender equality. (Gomes, 2020).

In the aftermath of disasters, the focus shifts towards restoration and reconstruction efforts. However, there is a noticeable lack of attention given to hygiene interventions, particularly Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM). Post-disaster research and documentation on MHM are scarce, leaving a gap in effectively addressing women's needs during recovery. (Nawaz et al.2010) argue that inclusive approaches to Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) programming are essential for addressing menstrual hygiene needs for women and adolescent girls. They suggest that empowering women through interventions such as water provision, water quality improvement, and hygiene promotion can be achieved by prioritizing women and girls' menstrual needs and preferences in response strategies.

(Atuyambe et al .2011) emphasize the importance of considering the safety concerns of women and girls during emergency sanitation interventions, as females typically manage water, safeguard water quality, and maintain domestic hygiene. Parker et al. (2014) observed a lack of consultation with women and girls regarding their menstrual needs in internally displaced people camps, neighbouring villages, and schools in the Katakwi district of Uganda, which resulted in poor MHM practices among them.

While disasters themselves do not discriminate based on gender, their impacts and subsequent recovery processes display significant gender disparities. It is widely acknowledged that men and women experience disasters differently, and existing gender dynamics heavily influence their ability to withstand and recover from these events. Gender inequalities often lead to disparate impacts of disasters, with women facing additional hurdles in accessing resources and support during both immediate relief efforts and long-term rehabilitation. (Davies, 2019; Gomes, 2020) Societal norms, such as the denial of women's property rights and limited participation in decision-making processes, exacerbate these challenges, contributing to their disproportionate vulnerability to disaster impacts. Women's roles in reproductive, productive, and community management work further compound the effects of disasters, often leading to increased burdens and hindered recovery efforts.

Despite these barriers, it is crucial to shift the narrative from viewing women solely as victims to recognizing their active and essential role in disaster preparedness, response, and recovery. Formalizing and acknowledging women's participation in these efforts can yield positive outcomes not only for disaster resilience but also for

advancing gender equality within communities.(Thorlund, 2009) Policy and program design must incorporate a nuanced understanding of gender dynamics in disaster risk and resilience, with a focus on developing gender-inclusive approaches to post-disaster recovery and resilience building. This entails not only addressing immediate needs but also integrating resilience building into broader economic planning processes, particularly concerning livelihoods for women.(Eger et al, 2018) Establishing national frameworks for gender-inclusive disaster recovery and resilience building is imperative to ensure comprehensive and effective disaster preparedness and response efforts. Disasters also present opportunities for promoting gender equality and institutionalizing inclusive practices, such as developing gender action plans led by women and enhancing women's leadership roles in recovery and resilience initiatives.

3.4. Intersectional approaches to Disaster Risk Reduction

Disaster researchers, policymakers, and practitioners are increasingly recognizing the imperative to comprehend and address the disparities experienced by various individuals and groups before, during, and after disasters. This necessitates collaborative efforts aimed at deliberate and systemic change. (Lee et al., 2022) Intersectional approaches are instrumental in scrutinizing and challenging discriminatory practices that disproportionately affect historically marginalized populations in disaster contexts. Intersectionality emphasizes the interconnectedness of different forms of privilege, power, and oppression, which contribute to unequal socioeconomic outcomes based on individuals' identities and circumstances. These approaches offer multifaceted benefits in disaster studies, revealing systemic patterns of vulnerability and resilience.(José Antonio

Gutierrez & Gibbons, 2020) However, their full potential remains largely untapped, with issues such as oversimplification, uneven focus on specific intersections, and dominance of Western perspectives needing attention to address the complex interplay of privilege, power, and oppression shaping disparate disaster experiences and outcomes.

The existing literature on disaster research often portrays women as being at a relative disadvantage compared to men. Women tend to have lower socioeconomic status and higher social vulnerability, leading to more severe consequences when disasters occur. (Yadav et al., 2021)They are disproportionately affected by disasters, with higher mortality rates and increased risks of sexual assault and violence, particularly in shelters. Women with additional disadvantaged statuses, such as disabilities, immigrants, ethnic minorities, and elderly individuals in poverty, are among the most vulnerable populations, and disasters exacerbate their vulnerability. (Maobe, 2021) While some studies have focused on the health status of pregnant women during disasters, others have highlighted the reliance of women displaced by disasters on sex work to support their families.

The differentiation of gender roles throughout the disaster process is attributed to various factors such as parenting responsibilities, poverty, social networks, traditional roles, and discrimination. (Mehta, 2007)However, women also demonstrate strengths and advantages in disaster management, particularly in mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery stages. They exhibit high risk perception and willingness to evacuate, emphasizing the need for gender-sensitive frameworks in disaster response. Women are considered resilient after disasters and are recognized as core

partners and leaders in disaster risk reduction efforts. Empowering women in disaster decision-making has been shown to effectively reduce vulnerability (Parkinson et al., 2018).

Despite their resilience, women experience gender-related vulnerabilities and face additional responsibilities during disasters, which often impact their mental and physical health. While there is a growing literature on women and disasters, there are still gaps in understanding due to the complexity of the context. Further exploration and understanding of the situation of women in disasters, along with the inclusion and clarification of gender issues in disaster research, will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of risks and disasters in society. Gender plays a complex role in determining vulnerability and resilience to disasters. Disasters disproportionately affect the poorest communities, with marginalized and discriminated individuals and groups facing the greatest vulnerability. (Ciampi et al., 2011b) Gender intersects with other structural vulnerabilities, such as ethnicity, race, disability, age, and social status, shaping individuals' experiences throughout their life cycle. Women, in particular, are often more vulnerable, facing higher risks of mortality and receiving less aid compared to men. This vulnerability is exacerbated by existing inequalities, with women in many countries being more likely to experience poverty, landlessness, and malnutrition (Lewis, 2016).

During disasters, women often bear significant responsibilities for household and family care, including providing food, water, and emotional support. Cultural norms may restrict women's mobility and access to information and support services, contributing to their increased risk of mortality (Valdes et al., 2009). In the aftermath of disasters, women may be left to rebuild their lives as sole providers

for their families, facing challenges such as food insecurity and increased violence against women. Young girls are particularly vulnerable to disruptions in education, forced marriages, and trafficking (Ciampi et al., 2011a).

Despite their vulnerabilities, women also demonstrate resilience in the face of disasters. They play active roles in creating community cohesion, organizing communal activities, establishing support networks, and advocating for their communities' needs (Zaidi & Fordham, 2021). However, post-disaster responses often inadvertently reinforce gender inequalities by prioritizing resources for male-headed households, ignoring women's small businesses, and excluding women from decision-making processes. It is essential for post-disaster activities to empower women and challenge the constraints they face, promoting their resilience and adaptive capacity (Kaur, 2020)

3.5. Conclusion

Gender refers to the societal expectations and norms regarding the roles, behaviours, and attributes deemed appropriate for individuals based on their assigned sex at birth. Recognizing the gender dynamics and implications of natural disasters and climate change is essential for effective disaster risk management, enabling communities and nations to build resilience (José Antonio Gutierrez & Gibbons, 2020). It's important to acknowledge that not all women, men, girls, and boys experience disasters and climate change impacts in the same way; differences exist within and between these groups, including individuals with disabilities, minorities, indigenous populations, the elderly, those with chronic illnesses, unaccompanied children, households headed by children or women, and widows. These

differences are influenced by various factors such as social, economic, and ethnic backgrounds.

The concept of women actively engaging in DRR is relatively recent, contrasting with the traditional approach of viewing women solely as a vulnerable group. Despite some successful examples, efforts to enable women's active participation in DRM remain scarce and fragmented (Erbaydar et al., 2021). Sustainability of such initiatives largely relies on broader engagement from governance institutions beyond the DRM sector.

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