

A Policy Brief Series Six

“Gender Consideration and Urban Disaster Preparedness”, Sudurpaschim Province.

In the time of increasing urbanization, and in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Paris Agreement, and other global development agreements and frameworks, it is felt important to understand that cities can be the source of solutions to, rather than the cause of, the challenges that our world is facing today. Well planned and well-managed, urbanization can be a powerful tool for sustainable development for both developing and developed countries. In this context, the SDG 11 is about the “Sustainable Cities and communities”. It is about to make cities inclusive, resilient, safe and sustainable. It highlights improving urban planning and management in participatory way. This goal emphasizes the safe and affordable housing and sustainable transport systems; inclusive and sustainable urbanization; protection of cultural and natural heritage; reducing adverse impact of natural disasters; reduce the environmental impacts of cities; provide access to safe and inclusive green and public spaces.

In the onset of the rapid unplanned urbanization trend in Nepal, the impact of disasters are increasing. Urban areas have different way to respond to the disaster events. In addition, the nature of hazards also different than in the rural areas such as environment pollution, urban flooding, fire, pandemics and industrial pollution. The intensity of damage due to disasters like earthquake is prominent in the cities with unplanned settlements and dense population. The land encroachment around river banks, open areas has been increasing the vulnerabilities to disasters in urban areas. Hence, the risk analysis tools are also different in the cities than in the rural areas.

Urbanization in Nepal

Nepal is among the 10th fast urbanizing countries of the world. As per the 2019 data, out of the total population 59.9% lives in the urban areas. Hence, it is inevitable to conduct urban risk analysis for effective risk reduction and management planning. Due to diversity in population, less coordination and lack of harmonious relationship among the people in comparison to villages, the disaster risk management process is bit complicated. The income, livelihood options, economic and education status of the urban people is different than the rural region, hence the risk analysis tools and preparedness also is quite different in cities than in villages. Similarly, the gender role in urban disaster risk management is different than in the rural region. However, the *representation and meaningful participation of women and at-risk groups in* all the spectrum of urban disaster risk management is crucial.

Key issues in the urban disaster preparedness and GESI integration:

Unplanned and unmanaged urbanization growing risk to women and at risk groups due to gender dynamics: The growing trend of urbanization in Nepal has increased the risk to disasters such as urban flooding. The encroachment of river banks and unmanaged drainage system lead flooding after heavy rainfall in the most of the urban areas. Women stays at home with children,

elderly and they need to take members of family, while men go to work and mostly stays out of the house. This has created risk to women when flooding happens. Similarly, in the flood prone areas of the river banks, *women are staying at home with children and elderly and hence more exposed to the hazards*. For example, Dhangadi is a heterogeneous community settings and internal migration from nearby areas as, unplanned settlements in the river bank is increasing risk to disasters. The city is prone to fire, floods and landslides, population is increasing daily due to internal country migration from nearby areas.

The growing urbanization trend, the types of hazards are also different such as air pollution, industrial waste management, water drainage problem due to unplanned settlements, pandemics etc. The incidences of flash floods due to lack of proper drainage system cause loss and damages to private houses and their goods. Due to poor drainage system, the water gets logged after continuous rain and roads and streets are flooded. The problem is prone during rainy season but the streets get water logged even in the slight rain also. The flooded water sometime mix with the wastes from septic tanks and soak pits and cause public health risks.

The strict implementation of national building code is inevitable to reduce the risk of disasters like earthquake, fire and flood. The unplanned settlement without building code implementation is the major reason behind the increased threat to disasters in urban areas. Similarly, the value of risk sensitive land use plan and its implementation through building code and ordinances is must to ensure the required land use planning for business centers expansion, agriculture area, open spaces with safe evacuation routes and industrial area demarcation.

Inadequate knowledge and understanding: Due to household chores and other family priorities, even women of cities are not accessed to the information on disaster risks and preparedness. Some are very busy in household works and some are busy in the office responsibilities. Back home, they are busy in taking care of the family. They have capacity to understand and take preparedness measures at household level to respond to the disasters but the problem seen is they have limited time to get the information and participate in the DRR orientations and discussions. Hence, they are not informed on the basic preparedness measures such as fire safety, go bag, open spaces nearby home etc. Similarly, more awareness campaigns on disaster risk management need to be conducted areas for their knowledge and understanding on disasters to promote more preparedness measures to respond to different disasters. Women are also involved in the community based committees such as “Tole Sudhar Samittee” in urban context. These committees must be capacitated in terms of the disaster risk management so that they can integrate the risk reduction and preparedness in their regular activities. They can discuss on the urban hazards, risk reduction and preparedness measures. Similarly, mothers groups can be capacitated and mobilized for preparedness and response.

Inadequate representation and lack of meaningful participation: Gender consideration and consultation are often not ensured when DRR policies are formulated and plans are designed. Vulnerability of marginalized groups are forgotten or not taken into attention while planning budget hence they might face challenge to access to the relief. The GESI integration in the bottom up planning process is less practiced, hence 7-step planning process should be gender sensitive

and socially inclusive and local government needs to be sensitized on how gender and inclusion is integrated on the seven-step planning process. The deputy mayors are the coordinators of the monitoring committee, hence they must be sensitized on the GESI integration in the local level planning process as well as disaster risk management cycle.

Single women groups are still not represented, nor is participation ensured neither consulted during DRR planning which restricts their equal access to relief packages which was reflected in COVID-19 response in Dhangadi. **Disaster Risk Management** committees have funds allocated for immediate response as part of preparedness however its access during disaster needs more attention for women and at-risk groups. During planning women and excluded groups participation is still nominal and more of patriarchal values are still dominant. Women's voices are not heard to the extent required. Priorities are less given in allocation of funds for people with disabilities, people with other different needs.

Less helpful sociocultural context for women: Discriminatory aspects are very important to address, less attention drawn, more women have to be in response and policy making process. Policy provisions are placed very well however the mindset towards women's role and capacity still needs to be changed. Trust towards women ability is often questioned during disaster management. In Covid-19, the protection cluster could not be viable at the local level however, the women representatives and stakeholders working for protection considered the issues in response. Women representatives' involvement in quarantine center management had exemplary role to acknowledge the leading role of women in disaster management which needs to be acknowledged and recognized.

Disaggregated Database System: Effective preparedness, timely and relevant response is ensured when the local level has the database of their citizen. The age and sex disaggregated data is helpful to take necessary preparedness actions to ensure accountable response to affected during disasters. The data and information of affected is often lacking during response, and hence increase further risk to women and at-risk groups, when they do not receive relief on time.

Views from civil society:

Learning are generated and identified during disasters but remains unaddressed in the next cycle, seriousness still required to address GESI issues especially in preparedness. Risk Sensitive Land Use Planning and its implementation through building by laws and ordinance to mitigate the risk to urban infrastructures.

Policy Recommendations:

- Representation and meaningful participation in the DRR policy structures (LDMCs, CDMCs and Tole Sudhar Sammittees).
- Enhance knowledge and skills of women representatives to ensure qualitative participation in the DRM policy and planning.
- Risk Sensitive Land Use planning of local level and its implementation through building code and ordinances.
- Identification of open spaces, safe evacuation routes and their management for the emergency response (shelter homes with WASH facilities).

- Disaggregated data base system at the local level, and arrangement of stock piles based on the citizen's profile.
- Strict implementation of national building code by the local government.
- Activate and strengthen protection cluster and address related protection issues and integrate its aspects in preparedness plans. Ensure GESI and GBV integration in upcoming preparedness planning for response.
- Emphasize promoting more human resources in DRR planning and preparedness/management at all level (province, local and settlements).
- Youth mobilization and develop women champions at all the settlement level to effective disaster preparedness to response.

Municipality Voice:

Municipalities have taken strong actions to implement reconstruction guidelines and minimum standards in house reconstruction especially commercial buildings following building code strictly. Both the municipalities are collecting data from settlements level for the information management and to strengthen the disaster response activities in coming days.

Dhangadi municipality has identified major hazards, and conducted questionnaire survey for household profiling but the information mostly is focused to carry out development activities, hence the data collection need to give similar priorities to also collect data of people who are more vulnerable during disasters. The sex, age disaggregated data is helpful to preparedness planning to respond to disasters.

Media Views:

Media representatives shared that there are private and institutional buildings in risk areas and building codes are also not implemented. Media must play role to disseminate the DRR awareness messages, they must advocate the authority to strictly follow the building codes and they should play role to disseminate the correct and accountable information to be reached to the every group of the community for their access to DRR information as well as relief.

Note: This content is reported based on the policy dialogue “**Gender Consideration and Urban Disaster Preparedness**”, Sudurpaschim Province held on 12th Feb, 2021; with Dhangadi Municipality, Godawari Municipality, Women Activists and CSOs.