



The South Asia Women's Resilience Index

Examining the role of women in preparing for and recovering from disasters

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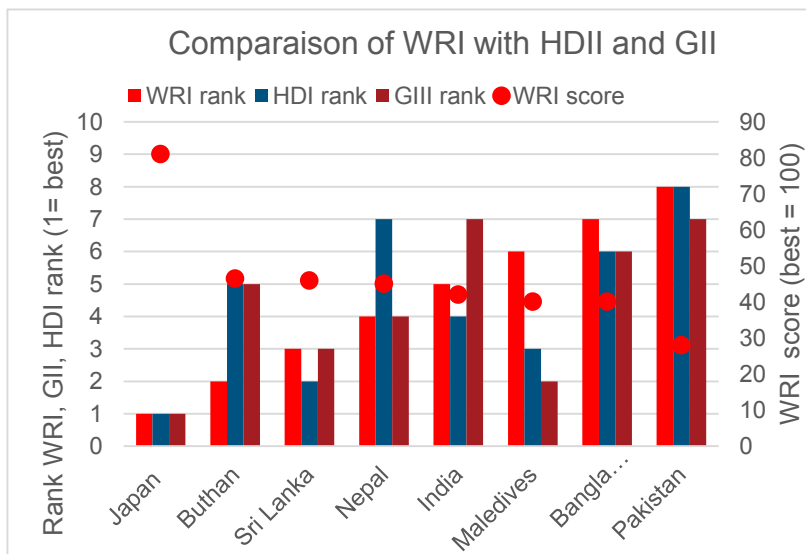
Introduction

All over the world statistics and experience indicate that women are more adversely affected by disaster events than men (1). The South Asia women's resilience index (WRI) published in late 2014 aims at measuring the capacities to withstand and recover from disasters in a gender sensitive manner. The WRI report, which was produced by The Economist Intelligence Unit and commissioned by Actionaid (2), focuses on eight countries in South Asia, including Japan as a reference. It assesses the extent of women's involvement in preparing for and recovering from disasters for a quantitative comparison and a qualitative definition of key factors and fields of action for a gender sensitive disaster risk reduction (DRR) policy.

The international post-2015 policy discussions, especially on the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA2) for DRR and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) are an important momentum to integrate such qualitative and quantitative data and findings at policy level for the implementation and monitoring of gender sensitive policies.

Methodology

The WRI methodology was developed and applied to eight South Asian countries, as one of the least gender equitable regions of the world. Japan was taken as a reference, having considerably more resources and capacities for DRR though being similarly



susceptible to a wide number of natural disasters. The WRI focuses on quick on-set disasters and draws upon a range of indicators in four categories: Economic, Infrastructure, Institutional and Social. Approximately 40 % of the 68 indicators are disaggregated to sex or are women-sensitive. The weighted indicators were aggregated to the WRI on a score 1 to 100.

Fig: WRI Score and ranking of the 8 study countries. As reference, the relative ranks of the Human Development Index (HDI) and the Gender Inequality Index (GII) both UNDP 2013. Graph compiled by the author using these sources.

Key findings related to the indicator set of the methodology

As reference, Japan ranks on top (WRI 81) over all four categories (Economic, Infrastructure, Institutional and Social). All other countries score over a narrow band (WRI 40-46) with the exception of Pakistan as lower outlier (WRI 28). The report summarizes the relevance of each of the four indicator categories: The economic indicator set reflects the level of economic poverty, state's funding capacities for disaster risk management, investments into mitigation and recovery and access accorded to women. The *infrastructure indicators* assess women's access to infrastructures and services that can mitigate disaster impacts and enable a faster recovery. The category on *institutions* contains a high number of gender sensitive indicators. The consideration of women's needs and voices in public institutions and related decision-making process is assessed, depending on the degree of decentralisation and participation mechanisms of the institutions involved in disaster management. The indicator set on *social aspects*, aims to assess countries' informal capacities to respond to disaster considering demographic structure and women's access to education and health, which suggests to combine risk reduction measures with the efforts of poverty eradication.

Overall findings and recommendations at policy level

The six key recommendations focus on the policy level aiming at a more gender sensitive DRR policy:

Women should be empowered to build disaster resilience at the community level through a higher participation in DRR at the front line. This goes in hand with the suggestion to move the narrative focus from vulnerability to resilience, tapping on women's resources of leadership skills and specific coping capacities for an effective disaster risk management. Governments at all levels should be increasingly held accountable for gender specific targets in their policies' monitoring systems. Therefore sex-disaggregated and gender specific data are required. Coordination and participation are fundamental for an effective disaster risk management, and particularly at the local level, social and institutional barriers for women's participation in decision-making process need to be eliminated. The conclusive last recommendation links disaster resilience with sustainable development. Resilience should be enhanced in emergency response interventions as well as long-term poverty reduction programmes, which requires participation and empowerment of women and the eradication of gender related disparities.

Discussion

The WRI focus on quick onset disasters in the context of South Asia. Climate change, slow onset disasters (e.g. droughts, soil salinization) and conflict are not explicitly taken into account. Indeed as past events and risk profiles indicate, for most South Asian countries mainly flood (related) disasters and hurricanes are particularly relevant for the highly populated coastal areas, which are continuously growing (1). The WRI methodology appears to be applicable in other contexts, though adjustments in the indicator sets might be required. Further studies to assess efforts at sub-national levels, differences between urban and rural areas and trends over time would be interesting to complement the picture. Nevertheless, the report's recommendations focusing at the policy level, might be addressed to any country facing gender disparities in their disaster management policies, several of them congruent with other similar studies related to the gender perspective in DRR (2, 3, 4).

Many of the presented indicators under the four categories and especially the recommendations are not particularly gender specific, but address the striking gaps between policies and practice, where the participation of most vulnerable groups and their needs are insufficiently addressed.

Conclusion

The currently ongoing international post 2015 discussion on the HFA2 and SDG for DRR and poverty eradication are an important momentum to reflect on the existing gaps, considering the insufficient consideration of women's needs and their limited participation on the implementation of the according process. For a successful implementation of these new frameworks (HFA2, SDG) they have to reach equally women and men at the grassroots level. The WRI might provide an interesting baseline for monitoring implementation accordingly.

References

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