

ENGENDERING DISASTER MANAGEMENT: A REVIEW OF POLICY AND PRACTICE IN AFRICA

Disasters have a particularly severe impact in Africa. Though Africa is not the most disaster prone region, the levels of vulnerability throughout the continent magnify the impacts of disasters. Disasters also have an inordinate impact on African women. Recognising this, the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction - Africa and the UN-HABITAT Disaster Post Conflict and Safety Section are jointly undertaking a gender review on disaster management in Africa. The review aims to deepen the understanding of the links between gender and disaster management in the African context.

The review has been initiated in recognition of the need to develop disaster management policies that take into account the different ways men and women are impacted by disasters and the different mechanisms they develop to respond to and manage these risks.

Thus, this review addresses the need, identified by both UN-HABITAT and UNISDR, to improve the capacity of governments in disaster management. Understanding how gender can be linked at the policy level in disaster management, and what effect this will have, both on disaster management practice as well as on the equality of men and women, will contribute to more successful disaster management strategies in the region.

Some of the main issues that have arisen in the preliminary stages of the review highlight the importance of equal involvement of men and women at all stages of disaster management. It is critical that this involvement is reflected in both policy and implementation. Women's roles as effective managers of disasters represent a vital resource that is largely untapped in the region. Understanding the different capabilities and vulnerabilities of both men and women will improve the effectiveness of both policy and practice related to disaster management in Africa. It is clear that there is a need not only for gendered policy but also for operational strategies to address the needs of women and men at a practical level in disaster management.

The review has selected three thematic areas on which to concentrate: access to land and property, HIV AIDS and women's economic security. It is believed that these three areas represent vital challenges to the equal ability of men and women to manage disasters in the African region.

The review and the recommendations arising from it will help lay the foundation for gender mainstreaming strategies for disaster management in Africa. This review will provide a basis for discussion and the development of strategic direction for the promotion of gender sensitive approaches in disaster management policy and practice. It will be completed by mid 2004, and the recommendations will inform the development of the NEPAD strategy on disaster management and will contribute to discussion at both the Kobe International Conference on Disaster Management in 2005, and at Beijing +10, also in 2005.

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