

AN ECOFEMINIST VIEWPOINT TO VULNERABILITY AND NATURAL DISASTERS

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Abstract:

A natural disaster is a significant adverse event arising from the earth's natural processes that overpower the local response and impact the social and economic growth of the affected area. Natural disasters have been seen as circumstances that, primarily of a humanitarian nature, cause problems and difficulties. However, it has increasingly been recognized that gender-based approaches to humanitarian response are important for vulnerable communities, such as girls and women. Although information on individual cases is scarce, evidence suggests that women are more likely to die after a natural disaster, not because of biological reasons, but because of gender norms that typically prevent women from accessing assistance, food and information. In this context, my research would concentrate on discovering how the ingrained cultural values of humanitarian actors and authorities contribute. In the aftermath of a natural disaster, the inability to consider the gender specific needs of the female population. The cases of the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami, the 2005 Gulf Coast Hurricane Katrina and the 2010 Haiti earthquake would provide insight into the unique vulnerability faced by women.

BACKGROUND:

My analysis exposes the vulnerabilities of the female population in the past decades in places where natural disasters have hit. Because of patriarchal cultures and socially constructed attitudes that contribute to higher female mortality, human rights are continually violated. Since, due to these drawbacks, humanitarian assistance does not reach girls and women, the recovery process is sluggish and uncertain. It is clear that natural disasters are affecting both men and women's daily activities. But it is much clearer that women's situations are even more troublesome because of pre-existing gender factors that, because of their weak appearance, put them in a lower role in society. To create a safer environment for girls and women, international treaties should also be strictly implemented.

- “A naturally occurring or man-made geologic condition or phenomenon that presents a risk or is a potential danger to life or property.” (American Geological Institute 1984);
- “An interaction of people and nature governed by the co-existent state of adjustment of the human use system and the state of nature in the natural events system.” (White 1973)
- “Those elements in the physical environment [which are] harmful to man and caused by forces extraneous to him.” (Burton and Kates 1964)

- “The probability of occurrence within a specified period of time and within a given area of a potentially damaging phenomenon” (United Nations Disaster Relief Organization).

The importance of these four meanings is that a physical occurrence which has a direct effect on human beings is a natural danger. In addition, it is incredibly difficult to foresee natural disasters and they often have adverse consequences that may range from mild to catastrophic.¹ In addition, a catastrophe happens not only because people are affected by natural hazards, but damage often occurs as a result of social, political and economic settings and how life is organised between certain conditions.

Disaster: A sudden event, such as an accident or a natural catastrophe, that causes great damage or loss of life.

Discrimination: Unfair or prejudicial treatment of different categories of people or things, especially on the grounds of race, age, or sex.

Gender: State of being male or female, typically used with reference to social and cultural differences rather than biological ones.

Gender Mainstreaming: Public policy concept of assessing the different implications for women and men of any planned policy action, including legislation and programs, in all areas and levels.

Human Rights: Privileges to all human beings, whatever our nationality, place of residence, sex, national or ethnic origin, color, religion, language, or any other status. These rights are all interrelated, interdependent and indivisible

Poverty: Condition where people's basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter are not being met.
Recovery: is a process of change whereby individuals work to improve their own health and wellness and to live a meaningful life in a community of their choice while striving to achieve their full potential

Vulnerability: The diminished capacity of an individual or group to anticipate, cope with, resist and recover from the impact of a natural or man-made hazard.

Natural Hazards: Unavoidable Risks In his book Natural Disasters, David C. Alexander states: “Natural catastrophes have the power to exert a substantial and consistent influence on modern society.”²

Natural Disasters: catastrophic event's behavioral Dimension

A natural catastrophe is a significant adverse occurrence arising from the earth's natural forces; flooding, volcanic eruptions, hurricanes, tsunamis, and other geological processes are examples.³ Regions affected by a natural disaster are vulnerable to social and economic effects that disrupt the population's normal lives. Examples of potential effects of a natural disaster include loss of life, vandalism, public health threats, poverty, and social inequality. As a consequence, it depends on the magnitude of the catastrophe and how vulnerable the affected region was to determine the resilience or capacity of the affected population to recover.⁴ The difference between natural hazards and natural disasters is that the former applies to any geophysical phenomenon, such as volcanic eruptions, flooding, earthquakes or tsunamis, while natural disasters include encounters between the two.⁵ For example, two businesses may be exposed to similar natural disasters, but they may have different vulnerabilities that may dictate their ability to rebound from the hazard. Hazards are thus simply external risks, but the resulting catastrophe is the effect of internal liabilities, such as insufficient building and maintenance legislation.

Vulnerability: The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) describes vulnerability as "the reduced capacity of individuals or communities to predict, contend with, resist and recover from the effect of natural or man-made hazards." ⁷ There are physical, economic, social and political influences that may assess the degree of vulnerability of individuals. As a consequence, certain causes can or will impede the willingness of the population to rebound from hazards. It is clear that poverty is a significant contributor to vulnerability. Poor people are most likely to live and work in environments vulnerable to potential threats, although they are less likely to have the means to deal with a crisis.

Research, Methodology, and Objective

The study will concentrate on recognising economic, political, socio-cultural and legal reasons that affect the response of states to disasters and respect for responsibilities under CEDAW, the Operating Guidance on Human Rights and Natural Disasters and local regulations. In addition, the research would discuss the importance of understanding gender mainstreaming in the public policy definition of evaluating the various consequences for women and men of any proposed policy intervention, including regulations and initiatives, in all fields and at all levels ⁹. Finally, the report would provide recommendations for urgent action to Governments, international organisations and global humanitarian actors to foster inclusion in order to create a healthy atmosphere for girls and women in the recovery process after major natural disasters.

Natural disasters are seen as sustainability problems, since development policy – both domestic and foreign – will make a credible difference in reducing the effects on poverty, prosperity and welfare. In the other hand, according to the IFRC, the displaced minorities that abandon their accustomed residence in collectives are examples of potentially disadvantaged communities. Typically due to a sudden catastrophe, such as an earthquake or a storm, danger or dispute as a

coping mechanism and with the intention of returning; migrants who abandon or evacuate their habitual residence and travel to new areas, usually overseas, to pursue better and safer opportunities; returnees of former migrants or displaced persons to their homes; particular classes within the local population, such as, Children unaccompanied, widows, aged people without family assistance, and persons with disabilities 8.

Vulnerability in Emergency Times

Ben Wisner et al. define gender as insecure as follows: gender is a pervasive division that affects all cultures and gives women and men access to social and economic opportunities. Women are often denied the right to vote, to inherit land, and usually have less power over earning prospects and cash within their own households. Normally, their access to resources is lower than that of men. Because our point is that less access to services, in the absence of additional compensation to provide safe environments, contributes to greater risk, we contend that women in general are more vulnerable to hazards.¹⁰ Several reports indicate that there is sufficient reason to be highly concerned about the environments and roles of women as a result of these circumstances.¹¹ The key cause for this issue is that natural disasters produce an anxious, unstable and disturbed atmosphere for the affected population. This climate disrupts daily operations and thus, shortages and inadequate access to services make the recovery process difficult. Weaker, dependent and inferior classes frequently have to suffer the worst of disasters. Such groups are likely to suffer more from both the direct consequences of a natural disaster because they are less informed, less prepared and less protected, and also from their indirect impact on public and private life as the disaster is transferred and compounded through economic, social, political and family relations.¹² Thus, this situation is considered to be a "double suffering" arising from the disaster. Women are in this position in patriarchal cultures, developed countries, and traditional cultural contexts.

Women and gender-specific vulnerabilities Social and economic challenges such as migration, public health concerns (e.g. polluted water, epidemics, malnutrition) and insecurity are linked to natural disasters. The effect could also be mitigated if municipal councils had met not only with international conventions but also with national regulations by previously established services and policies to safeguard disadvantaged groups in order to maintain the quality of life of people. Historical statistics show that natural disasters radically improve the poor housing standards of disadvantaged communities which have already faced obstacles and problems in ensuring that their civil rights are protected. According to Max Dilley in his book *Natural Disaster Hotspots: A Global Risk Study*, the most vulnerable groups appear to be the most disadvantaged due to lack of access to education, lack of protection and intermittent food sources, which appear to be women and children in less developed countries. ¹³ As a result, they become more vulnerable and their suffering is more serious during and after the catastrophic event. Even though knowledge about individual cases is sparse, reports, surveys, and post-disaster assessments

suggest that women and girls are more likely to die during a natural disaster not because of biological causes but because of gender norms that generally prohibit women's access to assistance, food, and information.¹⁴ Women face a double tragedy as they are likely to suffer not only material losses, but also intangible losses. Unlike men, who are frequently granted preference in hospital and food delivery, girls and women do not obtain urgent medical care. They are forced to leave their homes and are often relegated to the periphery as assistance is dispersed. Their health and well-being are also affected as they are more vulnerable to sexual abuse, trauma, elevated workload, And girls are also expected to marry older men etc.¹⁵ Women who are primary caregivers with greater responsibility for household work will then have less time and energy to raise money for rehabilitation and will therefore become lethal victims of this kind of emergency.¹⁶ Miloon Kothari, Special Rapporteur on proper housing at the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, reported in a 2005 report that 'immediately after the tsunami,' It was a challenge for women to be respected as heads of household and to earn their fees. Special attention was given to the needs of single women, including widows, only in a very few cases. Compensation has nearly always been given in all countries to male family members who do not usually share it with women. "¹⁷.

As a result , international humanitarian actors need to address gender-specific concerns of single women, including widows and teenage girls. The interests of international organisations must include, but must not be limited to: poor access to health services, displacement, violence and poverty. Many of the affected women had not been able to build a family and have not been paid since the death of their partners, "Women are systematically exempt from decision-making. Government strategies have struggled to provide women with new opportunities. "¹⁸ Many of the polls undertaken in the affected region during the following year of the tragedy indicated that there was increased pressure on girls to marry early and an increasing rise in underage marriages.¹⁹ It has also been recorded that parents who do not have enough income or food to keep their homes married sometimes too young daughters in order to free the family from any of the burden to take care of them. INGOs operating in the region of the tsunami-affected areas have also reported several new cases of bigamy, with men hitting more than one wife in the wake of the catastrophe ²⁰.

In addition, abuse against women was apparent in the wake of the earthquake and immediately after the tsunami. Miloon Kothari and his investigation team included in their special study that women were being dragged out of the water when they were swimming and brutally assaulted by local men. The report states that "the vulnerability to sexual violence is multiplying under camp conditions, where toilet facilities and living quarters are forced into the public domain."²¹ Women's testimony indicated that they were often asked for sexual favors' when they claimed to be alone.

Women also face particular obstacles in the face of disasters. Despite literature showing that women are more likely to consider and adapt to threats, women appear to be weaker than men and do not have the ability to respond to and rebound from disasters²². This dilemma is

especially apparent among single mothers whose poverty rate exceeds that of single or married women and who must not only defend themselves but also defend the lives of their children as threats occur. During the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, women and children were more likely to be injured and killed than men and boys were. Women's vulnerability to disasters is also shaped by traditional gender roles, power and privileges, low wages, and secondary responsibilities such as childcare.²³

Women and girls are also likely to experience more intangible losses (e.g., loss of health, mental illness). Women are subject to a variety of indirect impacts resulting from the incident, including abuse and distress, early marriage strain, loss or decrease in educational opportunity, and increased workload. Thus, they may experience a "double tragedy" and these more subjective consequences may be a true "catastrophe" for women and children.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, civil rights are continually changing. Since the first thoughts on the importance of gender recognition and vulnerabilities of natural law, this chapter provides a preface to how men and women are not treated equally. While there are resources to prevent prejudice, the experience of marginalized groups is not a ideal image. The next chapter will then assess the susceptibility of women to natural disasters and how they cope with the consequences of disasters when working for a non-discriminatory recovery process.

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