

Annex 14 - Gender

Executive Summary

Gender is an area that cuts across all economic and social sectors. Disparities between men and women exist in representation, participation and benefits in many sectors as well as in economic status and involvement in decision-making. The tsunami disaster has magnified such disparities and disadvantaged women further.

Reconstruction efforts should recognise and address gender disparities, particularly taking into account women's needs as usually male needs and interests are asserted and visible. Gender specific information is necessary in every sectoral intervention and in addition to immediate practical needs; strategic objectives to achieve gender equality should guide response and disaster mitigation.

Situation Prior to the Tsunami.

Maldives had made significant progress towards gender equality with support of national and International Partners. The Ministry of Gender, Family development and Social Security is the lead agency mainstreaming gender concerns into all sectors. Equality of men and women had been promoted in all sectors and increasing attention was being given to Gender-based violence. Gender-related legislation has been gaining attention and it is imperative that the momentum of the recovery and rehabilitation effort be employed in strategically promoting gender equality and women's empowerment.

The rapid economic growth and move towards industrial and service oriented activities caused many women to leave the labour force as the traditional economic activities that they were mainly engaged in declined. This decline was much greater in the rural atolls. However, with increased levels of training and education, labour force participation by women had increased in the last few years. Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) for women rose by 9 % in 2000 from the year 1995. Even with this increase there is considerable gender disparity in LFPR with male comprising 71.1% and females 37.4% (2000). Social beliefs and customs discourage women from participation in development, though for girls and women it is not difficult to find employment outside their home island. The increasing levels of male-generated income across the country also have allowed for the reinforcement of traditional gender roles as the need for the wife's or women's income lessened.

Traditionally men and women had relatively equitable role in the fishing industry, with the men going for fishing acting as fishermen and the women carrying out the processing and preparing of the fish. With the a shift in the Maldivian economy towards the service and tourism sector, together with the modernisation of the fishing industry, the fish processing activities done completed by women in the islands have been shifted to factories or have decreased substantially. This has significantly reduced women's contribution to the fisheries sector. At the same time this had considerably lightened women's work loads.

The tourism sector is the largest single contributor to economic development of the Maldives, yet only 4% of its employees are women. There are cultural and social restrictions against women travelling to other islands, and 'acceptable' kinds of work. These constraints limits their mobility and access to employment in that sector. The participation of women in the agriculture industry has been very high. Women maintain farming plots and grow fruits and vegetables in their homes to be sold locally, and within the atoll, and as well as the capital. The high participation of women in the industry can be contributed to greater numbers of men working outside the island.

There are also great numbers of women employed in the government sector. Also, many women are self-employed and work from home in such trades as tailoring, making traditional foods, curry powders, handicrafts etc.

Female headed households are high in the Maldives (46.6% according to the 2000 Census). There continues to be a high incidence of divorce and remarriage. The fact that men often work on other islands in the Maldives and remarriage means that women spend a significant part of their life without the support of a male partner in rearing children and bearing household costs. Thus, the kinship ties and support of the extended family play a crucial role in the situation of women in the country. Maldivian men are usually the social and economic heads of households, however, women shoulder the day-to-day management and decision making within the household. Major decisions are taken by the men the day to day management the household is shouldered by women.

Household management and child care was seen as the domain of the woman in both rural and urban areas. This is true even if the woman is employed outside the home and even in situations where both husband and wife are employed outside the home. The man's role is as the breadwinner of the family although women, in many cases, do contribute considerably to the household income. Women are greatly underrepresented in the legislative bodies and political spheres public life and in decision making positions. However, the numbers are increasing and today there are 5 female parliamentarians (2 elected) and two Cabinet Ministers and one Atoll Chief from.

Impact of the Tsunami.

The Tsunami that inundated the whole of the Maldives has left severely affected more than one third of the people of the Maldives population. Nearly 5% of the population was forced to evacuate their islands. Their homes, all their possessions and their entire livelihoods were destroyed and thousands remain in temporary shelters on other islands.

The death tolls today stand at 80 persons (3 per 10000) most of whom are children. The number women and men who died are exactly the same. Women have not been passive victims of the disaster, but resilient survivors who have been actively taking part in the reconstruction efforts throughout the country. They have been actively involved in care and support and the initiation of economic activities and social and physical reconstruction efforts. Men have also been severely affected and may in many cases not have the psycho-social support structures that are accessible to women.

Water and Sanitation, Health Nutrition and Reproductive Health

The lack of access to clean water, adequate shelter, food, and sanitation and health infrastructure pose a great threat for disease and infection, especially for pregnant women and children to contracting diseases such as diarrhoea, typhoid, hepatitis, viral fever and dysentery. Currently it is estimated that there are 1,500 pregnant women scattered across the 200 islands who have been affected by the disaster. Safe delivery conditions are a major concern as health and infrastructure and services have been severely disrupted and in some cases destroyed. Malnutrition, which is a common problem in the Maldives, is expected to increase as food becomes more expensive and, certain staples, less available. In addition to the destruction of many small businesses that provided staple foods, 30% of agricultural land and many home gardens have been destroyed. Nutritional supplementation for pregnant and lactating women as well as children is in urgent need.

With many health facilities damaged or destroyed, women, men and adolescents who depend on health facilities for reproductive health care and family planning methods have no choice but to go without. This could lead to an increase in unsafe deliveries, maternal deaths, unplanned pregnancies and the

transmission of STIs, including HIV/AIDS. The floods washed away contraceptive commodities on many islands leaving many women and young girls at risk of unplanned pregnancies. A possible increase in the number of pregnant women within the next few months, Given that pre-Tsunami contraceptive use was already low (CPR 34%), an increase in the number of pregnant women in the next few months could cause serious medical problems for pregnant women as prenatal and postnatal health services would not be accessible to all women and medicine would be scarce. Anaemia affects 51% of the female population; this nutritional deficiency is great risk for pregnant women as anaemia is an indirect cause of maternal mortality. Furthermore, the economic constraints on the family and the emotional implications of unplanned pregnancy could fuel social problems.

Recovery and Rehabilitation Response

- Fetching water to cook, clean and bath has traditionally been assigned to women - reconstruction efforts should ensure availability of clean water; beginning with cleaning and replacement of communal wells and water tanks, priority should be given to making clean water available at health facilities to provide safe delivery conditions.
- Specific focus on maternal health is required in the recovery phase; in reconstructing and replacing health facilities special attention should be given to providing facilities with maternal health equipment and medicines
- It is necessary to promote consumption of iron rich foods especially by women
- The momentum to replace lost RH commodities should be utilised to promote family planning and male participation in RH and the health of women and families should be promoted.
- The psychosocial impact of the disaster on men should be assessed and their particular needs addressed.

Housing and Shelter

More than 4,410 houses were damaged, out of which 1,569 houses were totally destroyed and 2,841 partially damaged. 13 Thirteen islands had to be totally evacuated. This has displaced 12,000 people, almost half of whom are female, who are now placed in temporary shelters.

As men are now compelled more than ever to leave their families and go find work to support the family or go back to their islands to start rebuilding their damaged houses, more women are expected to be left alone in the shelters and or living in other people's houses with young children. In temporary shelters and camps that have been set up women and children are more at risk of violence and abuse. The lack of protection that their own homes and families provided may exaggerate the vulnerability of the social position of women, especially of single mothers and young adolescent girls.

Women living in partially damaged houses:

Some families have started moving back in to houses that are partially damaged. Many of these houses do not afford proper privacy or protection. This especially puts women and girls at risk of robbery and looting and physical and/or sexual violence. Households headed by single women are considered easier targets for burglary and other crimes, including sexual assault and harassment. Even in households where men are present, the issue of privacy is remains a problem for women and girls in such houses. This situation is exaggerated in cases of families who were not previously living together and are now housed in small congested spaces. This would put younger children and adolescent girls at risk of sexual abuse as well as unsafe sexual practices that could put them at risk for unwanted pregnancies as well as STIs and HIV/AIDS.

Resettlement issues

The number of people who have been moved to houses in other islands and those who are homeless adds up to almost 20,000. One of the most pressing components of the recovery phase is providing homes for these people. In addition to repairing and reconstructing damaged houses so that people could move back in, other options that are being considered include rebuilding of damaged islands and encouraging communities to shift to new islands in line with the population consolidation and 'safe islands' policy.

Recovery and Rehabilitation Response

- Women should not be marginalised in the rebuilding and reconstruction of their islands and homes, families should be encouraged to take part in this process with women also joining the labour force - opportunities should be provided for active participation of women in construction, rebuilding their homes and communities
- Designing and management of the shelters for the displaced should involve women and women's groups; specially focused measures should be taken to ensure the safety and well-being of women and children in these shelters. Special attention should be given to camp/shelter management to ensure that women and girls have privacy.
- It is important that women who are single parents and/ or who have large families be specifically targeted and to ensure that their homes are repaired or reconstructed as a priority.
- Any housing scheme should particularly take into consideration the gender perspective. Women should be actively involved in the decision-making regarding where and how and and planning with regard to in what kind of housing unit or community/island that the family is resettled. This should also extend to designing the layout of the island.

Education

The tsunami disaster severely affected the education sector of the country; completely or partially destroying a number of schools and educational facilities and washing away books and uniforms that are needed to attend school and leaving many parents with no means to provide education for their children. The school going population of Maldives is 35% of the total population and the tsunami destroyed 30% of the 293 schools across the country.

The impact of the Tsunami on education including access and performance could be considerable. Amongst displaced communities. Girls will have less time for studies as their share of domestic work increases; women have the role of caring and cooking in the temporary shelters and in many homes home appliances have been damaged or destroyed, which means that more time must be allotted for those activities. It must be noted that the worsened economic position of the families could also greatly increase the school drop out rates for boys, as they might be expected to work as apprentices with their fathers or male relatives in order to bring in an income. .

A large number of boys and girls now homeless and destitute which provide an unfavourable environment for study and would seriously affect their performance in school. Educational attainment levels for girls are already low in comparison to boys and this could become worse. Risk taking behaviours could increase leading to increase in drug use and unsafe sexual behaviours.

Recovery and Rehabilitation Response

- Monitoring to ensure that girls or boys education is not compromised.
- Provide secure boarding-house facilities with separate housing for girls in islands with secondary/ higher secondary schools
- Life skills based education to ensure well being of adolescents and young people.

Livelihoods

The disaster would have highly detrimental effects on the livelihoods of families. The destruction of land and properties and its environmental implications will have negative long term implications, especially for women, as the mobility restrictions faced by women as well as societal norms would make it difficult for them to find alternative sources of income. The destruction of the livelihoods of women also puts them at a greater disadvantage as women have limited opportunities at island level for a means of income. This is particularly the case for single and divorced mothers.

Agriculture

The resulting environmental problems due to the disaster such as the destruction of farming lands and changes in the salinity of the water would prevent women from resuming their income generating activities. This would also deprive them from the opportunity of obtaining an income while staying in their home islands.

Fisheries

The disaster has caused considerable amount of damage to the fishing industry, with the destruction of fishing vessels, property and processing materials and equipments. Although the participation of women in the fisheries sector is low, the women who are presently involved in various activities of fish processing will face considerable setbacks. This will also have adverse effects on families dependent on fishing, with the reduction of their income having negative impacts in terms of their health, nutrition and quality of life.

Tourism

The tsunami waves had destroyed many resort islands, leaving some of them inoperative. This has also caused a reduction in the number of tourists coming into the country. While some of the resorts have closed for reconstruction, some of the resorts might have to lay off staff to reduce the losses. Women are generally tend to be employed in the tourism sector as cleaners, sweepers and cooks and hence at the lower ranks and are at higher risk of losing their jobs.

Women are also involved in community income generating initiatives, such as work groups and in income generating activities organised by the Women's Development Committees such as farming. Displacement would affect such working groups and disrupt their livelihoods.

Recovery and Rehabilitation Response

- Investigating the specific effect to women's livelihoods and sources of income caused by the destruction of property and land needs, covering women from all the sectors, including women who are self-employed.
- Provision of small small-scale loans to self-employed women in small small-scale micro-credit for women to be involved income generating activities to replace equipment etc. destroyed in the disaster. .
- Introduction of micro-credit facilities, complemented by technical training to provide women with alternate sources of income at island level.
- Programs conducted to make communities to change attitudes that restrict women's mobility and access to employment outside their home islands.
- Making employment in resort islands more accessible to women by providing transport facilities and addressing issues such as harassment at work and providing secure living quarters for women.

Ownership issues

Ownership of assets is a major factor which determines the economic and social position of an individual in society. Men and women can own property and land, although generally women own fewer assets than men. As asset ownership is a major factor in an individual's or family's ability to cope with extreme events women and women headed households are in a particularly vulnerable position due to the disaster. It is likely that more women would become economically disadvantaged as a result of the tsunami.

There is the danger that asset replacement during the recovery phase would mostly benefit men directly as they own assets that are more publicly evident such as shops and fishing vessel whereas women often conduct income-generating activities at home such as sewing or catering. The replacement of women's tools should not be ignored.

Recovery and Rehabilitation Response

- Inclusion of women and women's groups in the organisation and decision making relating to the replacing of assets, financial assistance and investment into the community
- Investment in communities with tangible capital assets to take place in a gender sensitive manner that takes into consideration the needs and losses of both men and women.

Protection of women and children

A large number of women and children have been housed in temporary shelters and also been moved back to housing that are partially complete. Such temporary housing tends to be shared with large numbers of people which leaves women and children vulnerable to physical and sexual violence and abuse.

While there is a lack of empirical research data in the area of gender-based violence, qualitative research conducted by the government with UN support confirms that violence against women and children existed prior to the Tsunami. This included domestic violence, physical, sexual and psychological abuse. However, the more extreme forms of violence such as dowry deaths and female genital mutilation are absent in the Maldives.

The displacement, loss of security, and destitution caused by disasters is often accompanied by sharp increases in depression, suicide and various forms of violence against women and children. The psycho-social harm to women and children caused by disaster's is as great as the physical harm with a sustained impact on children's development, as it affects all aspects of a child's wellbeing – physical, mental, social and emotional. The collapse of communities and disruption of the familial and social support networks could also leave women and children more vulnerable to psychological and emotional problems.

Recovery and Rehabilitation Response

- Provision of long term psychosocial support and counselling services to families affected by the disaster
- Immediate sensitive treatment and care for victims of violence and other forms of abuse
- Making temporary housing and shelters safe for women and children by increased security and monitoring.
- Creating awareness on the issue of violence and arresting and persecuting perpetrators of violence and abuse towards women and children.

