As those in poor rural areas continue to experience the crippling challenges of disaster, worsened by the negative influence of persistence. Disaster Management therefore operates within government structures where women’s opportunity for participation and improvement to further enhance gender aspects into project activities, trainings and tools.

As a result of structural and systemic challenges arising from Cambodia’s patriarchal bias, gender imbalances in favour of men and girls. The PAR within this study confirms this. Overall progress is slow, however. While gender awareness is improving, and the improvement of women in data collection activities would increase women’s engagement and assist in building their confidence. 

There is more to disaster risk management than simply ensuring that women are included. Disaster risk management requires not only sex-disaggregated data but a deeper level of gender awareness. The Community Based Disaster Risk Reduction (CBDRR) ‘Gender Role Mapping’ tool has brought a new focus on the differing experiences of women and men in the pre-, during and post-disaster periods. But more can be done to examine the barriers and constraints, and access to and ownership of resources. Gender should be mainstreamed throughout the guidelines and tools rather than ‘doing gender’ just in one or two specific modules/tools.

Low levels of literacy, and a lack of education and confidence (especially in women) requires a simplified participatory approach and more trainings were requested by participants.

Data collection processes were examined with a gender lens. Key qualitative data is collected monthly during general data collection for council planning purposes (in addition to DRR). This is gender disaggregated to a degree, but would benefit from further disaggregation: for example disaggregation of children into boys and girls. Qualitative data collection, which is valuable from a gender perspective, is undertaken once per year but requires specific skills and focus.

Further capacity building is required at all levels if a deeper level of gender sensitivity is to be achieved. The lack of women’s leadership on DMCs and a lack of women’s involvement in data collection may lead to a lack of gender focus and a lack of detailed community-level information, which women are well-placed to provide. The inclusion of women in data collection activities would increase women’s engagement and assist in building their confidence.

It is particularly valuable to improve the resilience of the poorest and most vulnerable, who are often identified as women and girls. The PAR within this study confirms this. Overall progress is slow, however. While gender awareness is improving, and the project is helping to identify vulnerable people for assistance (such as ID-poor women and their families), there is still room for improvement to further enhance gender aspects into project activities, trainings and tools.

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As a result of structural and systemic challenges arising from Cambodia’s patriarchal bias, gender imbalances in favour of men persist. Disaster Management therefore operates within government structures where women’s opportunity for participation and leadership is limited and there are no quotas for women’s leadership of – or even inclusion in – DM committees.

As those in poor rural areas continue to experience the crippling challenges of disaster, worsened by the negative influence of climate change, the need to continue mainstreaming gender and DRR is more important than ever.

METHODOLOGY OVERVIEW

PHASE 1: Gender Audit. An initial gender audit was undertaken to assess the gender sensitivity of legislation and policy at the national level; and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) guidelines, models and other materials at the sub-national level.

PHASE 2: Participatory Action Research (PAR). Participatory research techniques were used to examine the current integration of gender and women’s participation into DRR and Disaster Management (DM) at the sub-national level. This involved female and male members of DM committees in Kampong Speu and Kampong Thom, plus implementing partners and other local stakeholders. Women participating in the Saving for Change (SfC) initiative were also included.

Areas were chosen for research against two selection criteria: to represent the various types of disaster experienced and to represent the types of geographic locations assisted by the project: remote rural areas, less remote areas, and close to an urban area.

- Focus Group Discussions (FGDs): A total of 18 FGDs were conducted; eight with Commune Committee for Disaster Management (CCDM) members; and 10 with Village Disaster Management Group (VDMG) members. The sample also included two FGDs comprising members of the Saving for Change project in Kampong Thom Province.

Participants from a total of 31 villages attended: 14 from Kampong Speu and 17 from Kampong Thom, representing 198 individuals.

Women were encouraged to attend wherever possible, but due to the low number of women on local-level Disaster Management Committees (DMCs), only 24% were female.

- Key Informant Interviews (KIs): A total of 19 interviews with key informants experienced in DM and DRR planning were conducted at the provincial, district and commune levels. These people were mainly leaders of the DM planning process or members of the relevant disaster committees. Representatives of MoWA and DoWA were also interviewed, as were NGO partner staff.

PHASE 3: Consolidation of findings and recommendations. The PAR phase is linked to the gender audit in Phase 1 in order to make final recommendations. The results of the research will be utilised to shape future programming and tools.

The study found that gender sensitivity in DM and DRR is improving within the research areas at the sub-national level. Stakeholders said much of this was influenced by project work, especially through trainings and the introduction of new tools with a gender aspect.

A slow process, however, which requires sustained effort if more significant change is to be achieved. Negative traditional beliefs surrounding women and a strong patriarchal society persist in Cambodia. A deeper understanding of gender concepts is still required amongst DMC members and the word ‘gender’ is still thought to refer to women and children, rather than including deeper social relations between males and females. For instance, endemic gender-based violence in Cambodia is often seen as a traditional norm, rather than society needing to address the underlying causes and engage both men and women in the quest for solutions.

Other issues in Cambodia, including high poverty rates, a lack of education (especially in women) and a lack of healthcare, were identified as continuing challenges impacting on vulnerable groups in disaster-prone areas. These undermine the resilience of poor communities, but hierarchical sector plans and forthcoming sector EPRPs are potential entry points to advocate for gender mainstreaming.

HCVA planning processes have assisted communities in identifying the most vulnerable people prior to disaster, resulting in the prioritisation of, for instance, pregnant women, female-headed households, the elderly and the sick. The resilience of vulnerable women and their families was reported as strengthened through the Saving for Change programme. These initiatives have provided valuable social networks, which people are able to draw upon at all stages of DM/DRR.

The capacity-building of women has not yet, however, extended to those playing leadership roles in DM/DRR or wider civil society. PCDMs, DCDMs and CCDMs largely follow existing governmental structures at the sub-national level. As these structures are underpinned by patriarchy and a strong patronage system, most leadership roles are held by men. This represents a strong systemic and structural barrier to women’s leadership in DM.

However, the study identified some positive examples of women leaders encouraging other women to join DM committees. It is recommended that this is formalised, with the introduction of a database to centrally record: a) the names and gender of committee members; b) who is due to leave; and, c) with the help of DoWA and female DMC members, to identify and train women candidates for leadership roles.

The need to engage youth, especially young women, was identified. Incentives are needed to attract their interest in, for instance, volunteering in DM activities. However, barriers exist such as poor remuneration, resulting in young women reporting a preference to work for nearby garment factories or construction companies that offer better pay. The study recommends linking with women’s NGOs that are currently lobbying the government for increased female participation and leadership in local government, and to...