Women’s Views from the Frontline 2011: Detailed Report

VFL 2011 surveys showed that women were less likely than men to give a positive evaluation of the local government’s progress in most areas. Both women and men thought that local government did a poor job of ensuring that women and men participated equally, with women giving lower marks. Organized women’s groups gave an even lower ranking in most indicators, but in those that were higher, their experiences illustrate windows of collaborative opportunities for improving local government implementation of HFA. Women’s engagement with local government to inform, educate or collaborate greatly advances the local implementation of the HFA and should be a prioritized as a strategy for governments around the globe. This section investigates Women’s Views from the Frontline, focusing on the views of women-led grassroots organisations.

FINDINGS

VFL 2011 surveys showed that women ranked local government progress lower than their male counterparts in 19 of the 20 indicators. Fourteen of those differences are significant statistically, see below. Women consistently evaluated the performance of local governing institutions to be poor in implementing participation, gender equity, use of volunteers, review of policies, utilization of indigenous and local capacities, planning, having financial resources, monitoring, participatory monitoring, complaints procedures, information gathering, management and dissemination, and governmental coordination.

The 2005 World Disaster Reduction Conference acknowledged that all disaster risk management policies, plans and processes should integrate a gender perspective,¹ and the Hyogo Framework for Action recognizes gender as a cross cutting issue, stating that it is "necessary to ... ensure that risk reduction

strategies are correctly targeted at the most vulnerable groups and are effectively implemented through the roles of both women and men.\textsuperscript{2}

When asked if local government ensures that women and men participate equally in disaster prevention decision making and implementation (Indicator 1.2), the mean answer of both women and men fell in the range of “to a very limited extent.” Women, though, were even less likely to think equal participation was assured.

![Mean for gender indicator 1.2](image)

Comparing the mean of women (2.59) and men (2.64) for the indicator about gender, # 1.2

**WOMEN’S VIEWS FROM THE FRONTLINE (WVFL): Organized women-led groups**

The Huairou Commission, a coalition of grassroots organizations, NGO’s, networks and GROOTS International\textsuperscript{3} member groups, led the 2011 Women’s Views from the Frontline (WVFL) investigation, as they did for the 2009 VFL.\textsuperscript{4} Grassroots women-led organizations in 10 countries with experience in resilience-building participated, meeting as communities and with local authorities, and generating 421 responses, from Bangladesh, Bolivia, Guatemala, India, Indonesia, Jamaica, Nepal, Nicaragua, Peru, and the Philippines. In the Philippines, Damayan ng Maralitang Pilipinong Api Inc (DAMPA) entered the national coordinating committee for the VFL after participating in WVFL 2009.

For these organizations in, the process of conducting the action research provided an opportunity for engagement with local governments. For instance, as a result of WVFL 2009, the Lumanti Support Group was one of seven Nepalese groups which launched a National Resilience Network with GROOTS and Huairou support. This national network was responsible for grassroots women’s participation in the VFL and is currently implementing Community Resilience Fund.

In Bangladesh, the Participatory Development Action Program (PDAP) conducted follow-up dialogues to the 2009 WVFL, convening rural and urban meetings among local government officials and grassroots leaders. Engaging with their local authorities, they explored avenues for income and livelihood recovery, reforestation, planning for evacuation and housing repair, savings projects and cyclone training.

\textsuperscript{2} UNISDR 2008b. *Indicators of Progress: guidance on measuring the reduction of disaster risks and the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action.* [http://preventionweb.net/go/2259](http://preventionweb.net/go/2259)

\textsuperscript{3} GROOTS International is Grassroots Organizations Operating Together in Sisterhood, a global network of grassroots women’s organizations.

\textsuperscript{4} Huairou Commission authored a report for the Women’s Views from the Frontline 2009, in partnership with the Global Network of Civil Society Organizations.
The organizing and advocacy linked to WVFL 2011 coincided with post disaster mobilizing, and grass roots women convened by PDAP in flood stricken areas suggested long term collaborative DRR measures, such as tree plantation, high embankment construction, storage of dry food, and community emergency savings.

**FINDINGS FROM WOMEN-LED ORGANIZATIONS**

Respondents reached by organized women’s groups gave even lower scores than men and women in general in 15 areas of local government action. They showed greatest difference in ‘participation’, ‘monitoring’, ‘information dissemination’ and ‘taking into account local and indigenous knowledge, skills and resources’.

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5 Fundacion Guatemala’s respondents in WVFL2011 reported that women were critical agents for information dissemination, as they had the direct meaningful links to children, youth, adults and older people.

6 Utilizing indigenous knowledge with seed banks and the harvesting of rain water, Fundacion Apachita and the Centro de Mujeres Candelarias provide examples in Bolivia of civil society working to make communities resilient: strengths the local governments have not taken into account. In the consultative processes for WVFL2011 in Guatemala, women reported that a weakness of local government is their lack of knowledge of different cultural contexts or languages.
Comparing responses of women’s groups (blue) with those of men (red) and women (green) in the overall VFL survey.

Conventional wisdom characterises women as a ‘vulnerable group’, which usually leads to them being excluded from decision making. On the other hand, when there is investment in grassroots women’s groups, their practices and knowledge, this can reduce vulnerabilities of local communities and strengthen local government efforts to prevent disasters. Huairou’s Community Resilience Campaign currently has more than 350 community trainers in Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, with a demonstrated capacity to transfer practices, who are increasingly being asked to train and advise local governments.

Involving women works – India

In India, the experience of Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP) has demonstrated that involving grassroots communities and women in decision making and implementation is effective and can be scaled up. A Community Based Health Mutual Fund was launched in 2006, improving resilience by empowering women to take pro-active control over the health of themselves and their families, while institutionalizing partnerships with government officials. Working collectively by helping women access public and private health care, this program provides low cost services and preventive health measures for more than 15,000 members. The engagement with local authorities in the process of WVFL 2011 in Tamil Nadu revealed that women were eager for training, for obtaining assistance from community trainers in nearby villages, and for creation of emergency funds which could be developed and managed by self help groups.

The difference that the successful inclusion of grassroots women’s groups can make is shown by some contrasting results: for four of the indicators, women’s groups’ respondents actually had a more positive evaluation of local government progress than either men or women in general, including in ‘planning’, ‘financial resources’, and ‘training’. This may be

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7 These comparisons are illustrative rather than statistically significant due to the smaller sample size of the women’s groups.
because women-led groups are engaging with local governments, helping them improve their performance.

**Urban Poor Partnership with local government - Indonesia**

In Indonesia, Komite Perjuangan Rakyat Miskin (KPRM), a community-based organization of neighborhood groups, led by women, mobilized a constituency of 70,000 urban poor in the 2008 Makassar election to build partnerships with local government. It is now working with the mayor to draw up guidelines to plan settlement restructuring with integrated disaster response, disseminate disaster management information in schools, and strengthen a formal disaster response partnership.

Though all sectors (women, men and women’s groups) rated financial resources -- whether local governments had an adequate budget for disaster prevention -- as the element in which the local government has made the least progress, women’s groups respondents were less negative (indicator 1.8). This may be because their negotiations with local authorities are showing that local governments benefit from decentralized budget allocations and leveraging resources from national government to address resilience priorities, and the knowledge that resilience depends on more than financial resources.

**Decentralized budget allocations for grassroots women’s agenda – Peru & Nicaragua**

Following community mapping and negotiations between the grassroots women’s network GROOTS Peru and local authorities of El Augustino in Lima, the municipality was able to access approximately USD $43,000 from national funds in order to build an embankment and support reforestation to reduce flooding, to be oversees by grassroots women. The Union de Cooperativas de Mujeres Productoras Las Brumas in Nicaragua initiated a community mapping process, dialogued with local and national government about priorities, and developed a formal partnership with the municipality, which signed a resolution to set aside 5% of its budget to address grassroots priorities. Las Brumas successfully advocated for a ‘gender desk’ inside the municipality, which can monitor progress on institutional responses to women’s interests and the new decentralization law that provides a budget and a mandate to implement DRR locally.

Grassroots women of Groots Peru carrying out risk, vulnerability and asset mapping in Peru as a basis for engagement with local authorities.
Women’s groups may also have reason for being more positive about local government’s progress on training (Indicator 1.11), and the impact it can have.

Women as expert trainers – Guatemala and Jamaica

The National Disaster Management Agency in Guatemala asked grassroots women linked to Fundacion Guatemala to train government officials responsible for advising local authorities, and agreed to include grassroots women in emergency preparedness and response training and formally certify them as trainers. In Jamaica, grassroots women based Construction Resource and Development Centre has been a trainer and facilitator in the UN Habitat Participatory Slum Upgrading Program, and is developing a framework for resilient cities with local authorities. They have forged collaboration at the city, national and regional levels, including with the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management, the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Response Agency, and the National Climate Change Committee.

Planning (indicator 1.7), too, may be an area where the relatively higher score and specific experiences indicate that there is a window of opportunity for greater success in local implementation through collaboration with grassroots women.

Planning collaboration – Philippines

DAMPA, a federation of 95 urban poor community based organizations, led a community risk mapping process as a tool for mobilizing, agenda setting, and actions. Nine grassroots organizations mobilized more than 5,000 of their constituents, and negotiated with local authorities and other stakeholders to address the prioritized concerns, like planning a city-level DRR platform, secure housing, water, and land tenure.

In disaster and climate threatened communities, women typically are excluded from decision making and asset security (housing, land, capital), resulting in references to women as a ‘vulnerable group’ and programs that demote them to ‘beneficiary’ status. Yet this VFL presents evidence suggesting that when such women collectively organize at the community level they can function as strong champions and implementors of DRR, collaborating with local government and other key actors -- indicating an urgent need to shift institutional approaches to support these roles.

Recommendations from Women's Views from the Frontline 2011

1) **Establish decentralized DRR programs that incorporate incentives for local authorities to engage grassroots women's organizations as partners so that they can jointly leverage national government support for the locally led implementation of HFA.**

2) **Earmark financial resources to strengthen and scale up grassroots women's practices and partnerships that invest in grassroots women's leadership in planning, implementing and evaluating programs for building community resilience.**

Huairou Commission participating organizations: Participatory Development Action Program, Bangladesh; Centro De Mujeres Candelarias and Fundacion Apachita, Bolivia; Fundacion Guatemala, Guatemala; Swayam Shikshan Prayog, India; Urban Poor Consortium, Indonesia; Construction Resource and Development Centre, Jamaica; Lumantî, Nepal; Union de Cooperativas de Mujeres Productoras Las Brumas, Nicaragua; Groots Peru, Peru; and Damayan ng Maralitang Pilipinong Api Inc., Philippines.