

JICA × GEORGETOWN INSTITUTE

Empowering Women for Equitable, Peaceful, and Sustainable Society



As part of Japan's 2015 National Action Plan for Women, Peace, and Security, the government of Japan is committed to including women's perspectives in its development of policies and initiatives. One area of focus is how women are impacted by, and can meaningfully participate in, reconstruction from conflicts and natural disasters. JICA conducted a four-country joint study with the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security to assess the needs of women in post-disaster and post-conflict recovery areas and the effectiveness of past aid deployments.

THE NEED TO GIVE HIGHER PRIORITY TO WOMEN'S NEEDS AND RISKS

The first United Nations Security Council Resolution to define women's roles in peacebuilding and national security was adopted in 2000 – an international milestone in gender equality initiatives. Recognizing the gender-specific nature of violence which women often suffer in conflict situations, Resolution 1325 calls for all parties to incorporate gender perspectives and women's needs into conflict resolution, prevention, protection, and post-conflict reconstruction.

In response, more than 60 countries formulated national action plans. Japan formulated its action plan in 2015.

INCOME OPPORTUNITY



In the Philippines, JICA helps local women to sell fish products they make. The income the women make encourages them to be self-reliant.

WOMEN FRIENDLY SPACE



The United Nations Population Fund built a Women Friendly Space where women can talk freely about, and receive advice on, issues they usually don't feel comfortable discussing.

To better understand the current situation and identify gender-specific issues in disaster risk reduction and peacebuilding, JICA conducted a joint study in collaboration with the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security in Washington D.C.. The research was conducted in four countries: Haiti, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, and Afghanistan. The Georgetown Institute conducted research in Haiti, a small country that is located in the Caribbean Sea and that is geographically close to the US, and JICA conducted field surveys in the other three countries.

Yumiko Tanaka, Senior Gender Advisor to JICA and a member of the joint research team, explained some of the international differences she found. "There is a large differ-



A hazard map is prepared as a result of a fruitful discussion in the community.

HAZARD MAP

ence between Japan and other countries in the perception of challenges related to gender equality in natural disasters. There are not as many natural disasters such as earthquakes and typhoon in Europe as there are in Asia. Therefore, people in Europe tend to pay more attention to environmental and climate change issues. In the US, there are many studies on gender and peace-building, but there is less interest in natural disasters from the gender perspective," she explains. "On the other hand, in Japan, it has become conventional wisdom that women suffer more than men during natural disasters. For example, there were reports of higher death rates among females than among males and increased sexual violence against women during the Great Hanshin Awaji Earthquake in 1995. Despite this information, during the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011, this awareness was not fully utilized. We should therefore work to act on such information."

Asia, including Japan, is a region that is particularly prone to natural disasters. Sri Lanka suffered tremendous damage from the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami. The southern part of the country has a high risk of landslides. After the 2004 disaster, JICA provided assistance with resettlement housing in the disaster-stricken areas. JICA also implemented a micro-financing program for women. The joint study aimed to examine the effectiveness of such assistance.

Tanaka says that although both the Philippines and Sri Lanka have national action plans for natural disaster risk management that take into account socially vulnerable people including women, in reality, adequate protection and involvement have not been achieved. "This is due to a lack of funds at the regional level as well as a lack of involvement of women in the decision-making process," she explains. "In deeper rural areas, women are more bounded by home and family chores." In Sri Lanka, one of the loan conditions of micro-financing was that women should work for their families, but in many cases, the borrowed money was used up by their male family members. Research results revealed that the strong perception that women exist for their family members prevents the project from empowering women.

LISTENING TO VOICES FROM THE BOTTOM OF THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Makiko Kubota, JICA Senior Advisor on Gender and Development, was in charge of the field surveys on peace-building conducted in Mindanao in the Philippines and a survey conducted among female police officers in Afghanistan. She also observed that Japan's assistance did not adequately address the concerns of individual women. "Many development workers thought that the perspective of gender equality was not important for Mindanao's peace-building, since there are already many active female government officials in the central government," she said. "However, women with important positions among the Moro people, who are demanding their own autonomous government, are mostly the relatives of influential men within the society. There has not been a strong focus on the perspectives of the most vulnerable women, those at the lower rungs of society, in the peace-building process in Mindanao."

In Afghanistan, women suffer from even harsher conditions: 90% of women suffer violence just because they are women. In recent years, more female police officers have been employed to protect women. In a society of strict social norms, women filing complaints about sexual abuse run the risk of becoming social outcasts. "Female police officers resent the violence that many women including themselves suffer; thus, they are strongly motivated to perform their duties to help the victims," says Kubota. "To support these women, I felt that it was necessary to develop their capacity to fight violence as well as to support their male colleagues who recognize the importance of women's active participation in society," she says.

In all of these countries, it is important not only to listen to the voices of the most vulnerable women but also to encourage women to address their own needs and make steps forward. The study leads to the conclusion that women should join hands with other women to educate and train themselves to become self-reliant and play more leading roles. At the same time, each society should accept women's ways of living and leadership.

The well-known saying, "a chain is no stronger than its weakest link," means that a society is only as strong as its most vulnerable people, and those people are often women. As they become agents of change, society itself becomes stronger – a chain no longer in danger of breaking.

DISASTER PREVENTION



In Sri Lanka, on the request of local women and with the help from local people, Oxfam built a reservoir to prevent flooding.