

**TURNING GOOD PRACTICE INTO  
INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS:  
Investing in grassroots women's leadership  
to scale up local implementation of the  
Hyogo Framework for Action**  
*An in-depth study for the HFA Mid-Term Review*

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International

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## Executive Summary

This report begins with two startling findings. First, grassroots women’s organizations with strong track records in advancing community development find themselves excluded and disconnected from national disaster risk reduction and recovery programs. Second, multilateral institutions report that they have inadequate knowledge and political commitment required to advance gender concerns in the field of resilience.

Prepared as part of UN ISDR’s Mid Term Review of the implementation of the HFA, this paper is an in-depth study of the impact of social mobilization in disaster risk reduction (DRR). In particular, it focuses on the ways in which women act as agents of community resilience. The paper provides an approach to pro-poor disaster risk reduction through mechanisms that would enable grassroots women’s organizations to become pivotal stakeholders for large scale, effective local implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015 (HFA). In particular, it addresses HFA’s second strategic goal: *The development and strengthening of institutions, mechanisms and capacities at all levels, particular the community level that can systemically contribute to building resilience to hazards*. The core premise is that these mechanisms should be supported and scaled up by the institutions committed to advancing pro-poor and gender equitable disaster risk reduction.

The current study utilizes HFA’s five Priorities for Action to outline grassroots tools and institutional mechanisms that empower women to lead activities that transform their marginalization while reducing community vulnerabilities to disasters. Since grassroots women are grounded in local socioeconomic and risk realities, they are able to mobilize their constituents to develop DRR solutions that are innovative and dynamic, and would ensure that local authorities and civil society actors become partners in sustainable development. Case examples are drawn from the countries where GROOTS International and Huairou Commission work, and are presented with each mechanism organized under individual HFA priorities.

Priority	Mechanisms that Empower Women to Advance Community Resilience
<b>HFA 1</b>	Ongoing regional multi-stakeholder dialogue involving grassroots women’s organizations Government mandates and programs to engage women as problem solvers National/ city level agreements for government-grassroots collaborations Political contracts with elected officials to promote community resilience priorities Decentralized budget allocations in response to grassroots women’s priorities Local to Local dialogues
<b>HFA 2</b>	Community risk mapping as a tool for mobilizing, agenda setting and actions Mapping women’s access to resources and services
<b>HFA 3</b>	Formal recognition for grassroots women trainers Women-led peer exchanges to transfer and scale up risk reduction practices Grassroots Women’s Academies on Resilience for learning, agenda-setting and advocacy Community Action Research
<b>HFA 4</b>	Community institutions for securing community assets Community Resilience Fund
<b>HFA 5</b>	Gender balanced emergency response teams Women-managed spaces accelerate post-disaster recovery

While pointing out not enough has been done to create institutional incentives to engage grassroots women’s organizations in all areas of emergency response, disaster relief,

rehabilitation, and risk reduction, the paper analyses the factors that enable pro-poor grassroots-led actions as well as identifies institutional trends that created the opportunities for collaborations with government.

Climate change and the growing unpredictability of disasters compel us to stop doing business as usual. There is an urgent need for a radical change in the institutional approach to empowering women to reduce disaster risks, rather than more of the same. The study team recommends reversing the existing top-down resilience programming to invest in grassroots women-led initiatives as the foundation of local implementation of HFA. The following are four key recommendations:

1. **Reverse the current design and planning of DRR processes by building on grassroots accomplishments.** Rather than designing DRR programs and seek the participation of women and communities afterwards, institutions should build on the accomplishments of community based organizations led by grassroots women as their starting point for DRR policies and programs. This would ensure the development of local resilience priorities and mobilize the capacities and leadership of local communities.
2. **Support grassroots women-led demonstrations as learning laboratories for grassroots women, NGOs, local authorities and governments.** Much of the investment in community based organizations and grassroots women's organizations is in the form of training. There is a need to go beyond this to facilitate grassroots-led demonstrations, which enable women to apply their knowledge, refine their practices and mobilize their networks and partners to scale up and institutionalize effective practices. Such demonstrations should then inform new operational frameworks for joint planning, implementation and evaluation of pro-poor gender equitable DRR.
3. **Incentivize government and local authority's engagement with grassroots women's organizations.** Governments and donors should require and reward their institutions to collaborate with grassroots women's organizations. Such actions will formalize active public roles for women and set clear standards for engaging grassroots women's organizations.
4. **Set aside resources for grassroots women-led initiatives.** Grassroots women's organizations need flexible funds to identify locally appropriate entry points for DRR to mobilize communities, collaborate with local governments, and to experiment with innovative solutions to address local resilience priorities.

# I. Introduction

After major natural disasters, grassroots women's organizations have shown extraordinary capacities to mobilize women survivors to improve distribution of aid, access to resources, water and shelter, and making local institutions accountable in relief and rehabilitation (IRP and UNDP 2010, IRP 2010, Yonder et al. 2005, Enarson 2004, Akçar 2001). Despite their track records of success, their efforts seem largely invisible to international agencies, donors, NGOs, and governments. When the next disaster strikes, women's organizations are forced to negotiate afresh to ensure their active participation in relief and rehabilitation processes. Although building local capacity is the new mantra in humanitarian programs, institutions appear to be slow to learn to be more gender sensitive and socially inclusive (Christoplos 2005).

In disaster preparedness and risk reduction, which draws upon lessons from both the field of disaster response and recovery as well as development, the disconnect between rhetoric of capacity building and actual implementation is similar. A recent survey finds that grassroots women felt that they have been excluded from emergency preparedness and other disaster risk reduction programs (HC 2009b). This is in spite of decades of remarkable successful track records of grassroots women's work in redressing development failures and reducing everyday risks for their households in sectors such as housing, water, sanitation, etc. In order to achieve local implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA), institutions must learn to collaborate with grassroots women's organizations to scale up pro-poor, locally responsive, and gender equitable disaster risk reduction programs.

## Purpose of this Study

This paper has been prepared as part of UN ISDR's Mid Term Review of the implementation of the HFA, it is an in-depth study of the impact of social mobilization in disaster risk reduction (DRR). In particular, it focuses on the ways in which women act as agents of community resilience. The paper provides an approach to pro-poor disaster risk reduction through mechanisms that would enable grassroots women's organizations to become pivotal stakeholders for large scale, effective local implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015 (HFA). In particular, it addresses HFA's second strategic goal: *The development and strengthening of institutions, mechanisms and capacities at all levels, particular the community level that can systemically contribute to building resilience to hazards.*

The current study utilizes HFA's five Priorities for Action to outline grassroots tools and institutional mechanisms that empower women to lead activities that transform their marginalization while reducing community vulnerabilities to disasters. Since grassroots women are grounded in local socioeconomic and risk realities, they are able to mobilize their constituents to develop DRR solutions that are innovative and dynamic, and would ensure that local authorities and civil society actors become partners in sustainable development.

For the purposes of affirming grassroots women's definition of resilient practices, certain case examples illustrated in this study do not explicitly address disasters, but focus on development priorities identified by the communities as keys to reducing their vulnerabilities -- securing their asset base to cushion from slow-onset disasters (e.g. droughts) or extreme hazard events (e.g. hurricanes and earthquakes). While some examples represent over a decade of sustained work by community organizations, others are fledgling efforts. However, all the examples represent significant shifts in the way institutions are formally engaging grassroots women and their communities.

This study is intended to provoke a renewed discussion on how international agencies, donor organizations, and policymakers to enable those who are most affected by disasters and also the most committed to building resilience to take ownership of DRR processes.

## Concepts of Vulnerability and Resilience

Since the 1990s there has been a drumbeat of voices, from both scholars and practitioners pointing to the uneven distribution of disaster-related deaths between developed and developing countries.<sup>1</sup> Since the publication of Mary Anderson and Peter Woodrow's book *Rising from the Ashes* (1989), it is now generally accepted by the field<sup>2</sup> that structural factors, such as political, social, and cultural marginalization contribute to increased risks to death, injuries, loss of assets and livelihoods. In many areas of the world, this results in disaster's disproportionate affects on the poor and women.

In addition to differences in casualty rates, women and children have shorter life expectancies after disasters happened. An analysis of disasters in 141 countries also shows that gender-differentiated vulnerabilities correspond to the degree of absence of women's economic and social rights (Neumayer and Plümper 2007, Oxfam International 2005, Enarson and Morrow 1998).

The recognition of structural factors in exacerbating the impact of disasters for marginalized communities has led to the development of the vulnerability framework (Buchanan-Smith and Fabbri 2005, Christoplos 2004, Buchanan-Smith and Maxwell 1994). By showing how gender inequities affect women disproportionately in disaster contexts (Enarson and Morrow 1998), it highlights the factors that deepen the marginality of women from poor communities, such as illiteracy, low ownership of assets, limited sources of income and access to financial services, as well as lack of political participation. Although in certain cases, more

## Grassroots women's perspectives on Resilience

Grassroots women's groups consist of women who are socially, economically and politically marginalized, organized into groups, e.g. self-help groups, federations of savings and credit groups, peasant organizations and producers cooperatives, etc. They live and work in poor and low-income communities in urban and rural areas.

From the grassroots' perspective, resilience is the capacity of a community to organize itself to reduce the impact of disasters by protecting lives, livelihoods, homes, assets, basic services, and infrastructure. Capacities include skills, knowledge, resources, practices and networks.

Resilience includes the capacities of communities to advance development processes, social networks and institutional partnerships that help women recognize and build on existing efforts that reduce the impact of disasters.

*"Comite de Emergencia Garifuna and GROOTS consistently highlighted that indigenous communities, drawing on their ancestral knowledge, have been practicing resilience for centuries, without naming it as such. ...Disaster risk reduction needs to be turned upside down to reverse the fact that the field is too focused on language and context setting when it needs to be focused on changing the situation and the actors."*

--Margaret Arnold, Head of the ProVention Secretariat

*"People are always amazed by the amount of work [grassroots women do] -- and there is acknowledgement, but there is a disconnect - - we get a clap for the work, but we don't see the resources. How can partners support this? Can we ask for partners to speak with government and ensure that they create openings in their budgets with a gender lens? We need to create a mechanism where women feel free to access this work on the ground."*

-- Carmen Griffiths, Construction Resource

men die in disasters and suffer different types of stress (GDN 2009, Pincha 2008); women's productive and reproductive roles, which compound their vulnerabilities in disaster situations, are often unacknowledged and invisible.

Along with vulnerabilities, resilience emerged as one of the most important concepts in disaster management and climate change adaptation. The concept of resilience originates from sustainable development frameworks where experts refer to (a) the magnitude of shock that a social-ecological system can absorb and remain within a given state, (b) the degree to which the system is capable of self-organization, and (c) the degree to which the system can build capacity for learning and adaptation (Folke et al. 2002). Used in disasters and climate change contexts, resilience refers to "the capacity of people or economies to absorb loss and recover." Therefore, within the vulnerability framework, one would say: "poor households often have low resilience to loss due to a lack of savings, reserves or insurance" (UN 2009).

## HFA and Gender

Within the HFA framework, gender is recognized as a crosscutting issue. It states that "Gender shapes the capacities and resources of individuals to build resilience, adapt to hazards and to respond to disasters. It is thus 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" (UNISDR 2008b). The current outlook shows that we are far from the goals set forth by the HFA.

A recent survey by Global Civil Society Network on Disaster Reduction, entitled "Views from the Frontline," reveals a serious absence of national-local coordination and lack of awareness of disaster risk reduction activities in community based organizations and local governments in high-risk countries (Global Network-DR 2009). This disconnect is echoed in "Women's Views from Frontline" in which voices of women are included in the civil society assessment. Initiated by the Huairou Commission, the assessment surveys women's organizations that have been involved in advancing development priorities in their communities in Latin America, the Caribbean, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East and North Africa region (HC 2009b).<sup>3</sup> The four major findings of the report are:

- There is a disconnect between national programs and grassroots organizations
- Women are excluded from emergency preparedness and response programs
- Stakeholders lack a shared definition of effective risk reduction in poor, vulnerable communities
- Organized constituencies of women with pro-poor disaster risk reduction practices represent untapped potential

From the point of view of multi-lateral institutions, the concept of gender mainstreaming has been proposed as a vehicle to include gender in policies and implementation.<sup>4</sup> The report *Making Disaster Risk Reduction Gender-Sensitive Policy and Practical Guidelines* outlines steps that could be taken to integrate gender in DRR (UNISDR et al. 2009) but it states that there are several constraints to realizing the recommendations such as:

- Poor understanding of gender in disaster risk reduction linkages at the policy and practitioner levels;
- Gender issues are often institutionally marginalized within organizations;
- There is a lack of genuine political accountability and financial resources for global advocacy and action on gender and disaster risk reduction.

Similar observations of the lack of progress in gender mainstreaming are also pointed out in Gender and Disasters Network's report to UNISDR's 2009 *Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction* (GDN 2009).

More importantly, national policies continue to focus mainly on emergency response rather than disaster risk reduction (UNISDR 2009: 135). This approach, as noted by the HFA, fails to address the systemic problems of poverty and disaster and often positions women in the communities as victims and beneficiaries, rather than innovators and agents of change.

## Scaling up Grassroots Women's Successes

Throughout this study, references to grassroots women refer to women who are organized into savings and credit groups and federations, community banks, agricultural cooperatives, women and children's centers, community tool banks, neighborhood groups, slum dwellers' federations and indigenous organizations in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. They are poor or low income, and for the most part, marginalized from formal institutions and decision-making processes. The majority of them became organized because their community was facing hazardous or catastrophic events such as severe drought, typhoons, a public health crisis, or slum clearing, etc.

Grassroots women have long-term agendas even if their entry points are short-term projects such as recovery and reconstruction programs. They are committed to empowering themselves in order to reduce their vulnerabilities to everyday risks and large-scale disasters. Rather than focusing exclusively on women's issues, grassroots women work on issues that impact households and communities, thus they often work alongside men to realize shared goals.

This study addresses the disconnect between grassroots women-driven initiatives and public sector stakeholders. In particular, Chapter III illustrates a cluster of case examples that show how grassroots women are undertaking new public roles, reconfiguring relationships with institutions and facilitating access to public resources in order to reduce community vulnerabilities. Their accomplishments meet multiple definitions of resilience, especially in regards to how grassroots women are improving a local system through self-organizing while allowing the system to learn and adapt. These initiatives need to be nurtured and scaled up to increase political accountability and to inform operational DRR frameworks.

Finally, in regards to scaling up grassroots mechanisms for DRR activities, by no means the authors are suggesting that the mechanisms are to be replicated in a top-down program. Quite the opposite, the strategies are to remain grounded in local realities and driven by the community members themselves. In particular, we refer to John Twigg's (2004) characterization of "scaling up"<sup>5</sup> -- *multiplicative* and *diffusive* strategies such as organizing, networking, training, informal learning, and policy reforms are the cornerstones of grassroots women's work.

The grassroots organizations featured in this report have been in existence for over a decade, and are experts at building constituents, mobilizing communities, engaging government entities, NGOs, and the private sectors to leverage resources and implement positive change. Through

### Bringing grassroots women's activities to scale

Prema Gopalan of Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP) writes that: “[S]mall investments for communities and women's groups -- in terms of organizing support -- have led to big development and resilience outcomes for disaster prone communities. To date, self-help groups have mobilized over 30,000 women after the tsunami, and across the three states in India where there are at least 200 grassroots women trainers. They are transferring effective recovery and resilience practices across communities.”



a community resilience framework, GROOTS International and Huairou Commission are helping grassroots women to see their development initiatives through the lens of disaster risk and vulnerability reduction. It shifts away from seeing women as victims; instead, focuses on their activities and leadership to redress institutionalized marginality and development failures.

## **How this study is organized**

The study begins with **Chapter II -- Women as Agents of Change**. It explains the theory of change that enabled grassroots women to mobilize, organize, and lead development initiatives that address community priorities. **Chapter III -- Mechanisms that Empower Women to Advance Community Resilience** shows how, contrary to mainstream misperception that grassroots women's work is small scale, dispersed, and ad hoc, evidence demonstrate that grassroots women's tools and strategies have been utilized across continents in both rural and urban contexts, resulting in formal recognition by and collaboration with government entities. This chapter outlines mechanisms that can be upstreamed to support change at the local level. **Chapter IV- Conclusions** proposes a new approach to promoting gender-equitable, pro-poor resilience.

The methodology undertaken in this study combines interviews and written communications to draw insights from field experience in order to supplement published reports from international organizations and scholarly studies.

## II. Women as Agents of Change

Most gender experts agree that empowerment refers to “the enhancement of assets and capabilities of diverse individuals and groups to engage, influence and hold accountable the institutions which affect them.” This involves agency exercised by women as individuals and as groups. To enable empowerment to occur, institutions would need to remove barriers and enhance incentives to increase access to assets and development opportunities (Malhotra et al 2002). While noting salient points in feminist debates, this chapter outlines strategies that support grassroots women as agents of change.

As individuals, women are severely constrained in their ability to transform their vulnerabilities. Women's multiple reproductive and productive roles usually render them isolated and fragmented, with limited power to negotiate many decisions that impact their lives. An emerging concept in poverty studies proposes the idea that people are marginalized not because institutions left them out; in fact, they are *incorporated* by institutions in ways that undermine their opportunities for development (Eyben et al. 2008). This is why empowering women in poor and marginalized communities involve a long and arduous process because it inevitably confronts structures of power.

The experience of grassroots organizations shows that their foundations of countering institutional exclusions are built on collective actions. Collective action implicates a renegotiation of the status quo and shifts in power. Thus, it cannot be separated from politics. Once organized, the poor and the marginalized communities have been able to extract concessions from authorities with a remarkable degree of success. Social mobilization requires long-term investment in leadership, organizing citizens, and building constituency. Grassroots organizations do not take coalition building for granted. For they often have to overcome differences presented in diverse contexts such as ethnicity, class, etc.

### Operationalizing an Empowerment Approach

Practitioners and researchers point out that normative gender-sensitive frameworks have not produced results on the ground. Moreover, gender planning and policies are implemented in ways that do not recognize the complexity of gender and power relations (Razavi and Miller 1995).

#### **The importance of women's leadership in grassroots organizations**

*“If you want to make qualitative change, women have to be in on it. For us, women’s participation is a central, non-negotiable feature in all community action. In our work with communities, we don’t separate women’s issues from general community issues. Instead, we work with our federation partners to guide each community along to a point where the central participation is women is not only allowed but nurtured. This has gradually built a strong federation of women’s leadership in Mahila Milan, in which women are treated as the initiators and not consumers of change. It’s clear to us that this strength emerged from men and women working together.”*

-- SPARC\*, India (ACHR 2000)

\*Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centres (SPARC) integrates women’s leadership in its community-based work. SPARC is a member of Slum Dwellers International (SDI), a global organization of urban poor. It is a peer global network similar to, but not associated with, GROOTS International.

This results in a superficial application of gender policies from the top. Such programs have no lasting impact as they reproduce and often reinforce gender-biases and socio-economic marginalization (Terry 2009). More specific critiques point to development's de-politicization of women's empowerment. It should be underscored that with limited focus and timeframes, project-based interventions cannot improve women's structural marginalization (Alvarez 2009, Kabeer 2005). Quick fixes in one sphere (e.g. economic) can be reversible. When women do find ways to work together effectively, they bring about change in their and other people's lives, including men's (Cornwall 2007).

Operationalizing women's empowerment necessarily starts from the grassroots, which entails variations of collectives with organizational and leadership structures distinct and autonomous from the NGOs that mobilize them. These groups formulate their own priorities, develop a theory of change, common agenda, action strategies, and discover its own knowledge building and critical reflection processes (Batliwala 2008). In this sense, outside development institutions are merely facilitators. Experiences from GROOTS International and Huairou Commission rely on a combination of addressing women's practical and strategic interests. Distinctions between the two are articulated by Caroline Moser (1989), based on Maxine Molyneux's analysis of women's mobilization during Nicaragua's Sandinistas movement. Practical needs, such as income generation, access to services, food security, and housing are opportunities in which women can bring into public their management skills. Through this process, women re-position themselves in the eyes of their families and communities, which speaks to their strategic needs.

An important aspect to grassroots mobilization addresses lateral connections between grassroots groups via federations and network so that transfer of knowledge and strategies can be learned organically. For example, savings and loan programs demonstrate one of the most concrete practical processes that facilitate collective management and capacity building for marginalized women. Through facilitation by stronger groups or networks, evidence shows that small, scattered savings and loan groups are likely to link to other groups and form networks or federations as they gain experience. Together, they are able to leverage resources and power and become able to access mainstream financial mechanisms for their members.

Grassroots learning and action networks are different from most women's and civil society networks that focus on advocacy. Networks allow grassroots women to address more substantive structural issues -- to address their strategic interests. By linking grassroots women's groups, they are able to pool their knowledge, increase their visibility and recourses, and reaffirm grassroots women's leadership. They are also better able to negotiate their exclusions, allowing constituents to seek accountability, form partnerships with civil society or private sector actors, or collaborate with government entities. Grassroots networks focus its programs in peer learning and collaborations to build capacity of grassroots women so they may develop constructive relationships with other stakeholders (HC 2010a, UN-HABITAT and HC 2004).

In sum, the importance of 'autonomous grassroots activity' needs to be underscored. Nira Yuval-Davis (1994) points out that offering "subordinate groups new knowledge about their own experiences can be empowering. But revealing new ways of knowing that allow subordinate groups to define their own reality has far greater implications." Supportive factors for grassroots women's success may be attributed to the history of social mobilization in the communities, implementation of de-centralization in government institutions, high level of participation in the citizenry, and availability of public, civil society or private sectors actors to provide resources, and assistance (see Chapter IV's conclusion and recommendations).

## Grassroots Women Building Resilience

Grassroots women's ability to transform their assets, from basic needs such as food, water, shelter to increasing security from savings and credit programs, crop diversification, marketing, healthcare are the foundation of reducing long-term vulnerability. It is the culmination of capacities, skills, experiences and the relationships built over time that strengthen grassroots women to become central actors in building resilient communities.

With much of the resources and efforts concentrating in emergency preparedness, emphasis on asset-based accumulation as a comprehensive approach to needs to be underscored for long-term risk reduction and climate change adaptation (Vatsa 2004, Moser and Satterthwaite 2008, Moser et al. 2010). Moser defines assets as “a stock of financial, human, natural, or social capital resources.” She emphasizes that assets are “not simply resources that people use to build livelihoods, they give them the capacity to acquire, develop, and improve assets.” Assets are important when intergenerational transfers are taken into account<sup>6</sup> and have long-term impact on reducing poverty and vulnerabilities.<sup>7</sup>

An asset accumulation approach therefore, is the “operational approach for designing and implementing sustainable accumulation strategies linked to opportunities and risk management.” In contrast, while livelihood and social protection approach would provide much needed immediate coping strategies during emergency response, they are short-term fixes and likely to vary significantly without any change in people’s underlying circumstances (Moser 2009, Moser and Satterthwaite 2008). Moreover, in circumstances where the asset base is meager, as in the case of poor and marginalized communities, it is not possible to simply protect their existing asset base, as it has to be increased in order to provide resources for survival and cushioning shocks (Fordham and Gupta 2011).

*“We cannot obtain our goals individually -- we need to work jointly in a network for advocacy and community based work.”*

-- Reunka Kukule Kankanamge, Resource Center for Urban Poor, Sri Lanka, Feb 2010

*“There is no famine or tragedy when people are organized in solidarity and in consciousness of the reality in which they live.”*

-- Nereide Segala, Network of Pintadas in Bahia, Brazil, April 2010

Grassroots women's resilience practices bring together practical and strategic interests to address asset building. The next chapter describes how organized groups and networks of women are setting agendas, building strategic partnerships, and making public institutions accountable to poor communities. While not all of the examples are explicitly linked to disaster, they have implications for reducing vulnerabilities of poor communities.

### **III. Mechanisms that Empower Women to Advance Community Resilience**

This chapter provides short descriptions of grassroots mechanisms, organized according to each of the five HFA priorities for action. It points to tools and strategies that grassroots women have used to organize, learn, and engage with authorities for sustainable development outcomes. The examples are intended to demonstrate that with appropriate resources and support, women from poor and marginalized communities can act collectively to reduce risks and vulnerabilities to disaster in ways that benefit their households and communities. It offers concrete examples of local implementation and scaling up of the HFA. Instead of top-down, standardized solutions for replication, grassroots women utilize local, regional, and global learning networks to disseminate their practices horizontally, allowing each community to learn and adapt the practice to their situations.

Institutional frameworks can provide opportunities for grassroots women to expand and strengthen pro-poor resilience efforts. Policy mandates for community and women's participation, widespread in development discourse, has been introduced to DRR as well as in humanitarian response, recovery and reconstruction (Twigg 2004, Christophlos 2005). Participation, however, has both passive and active types.<sup>8</sup> The starting point of grassroots strategies is to mobilize constituents to collectively transform their quality of life, thus allowing women to organize and set their own priorities independent of external institutions. The enabling institutional factors here are decentralization through which decision-making powers and finances are devolved to local administration with mandates for citizen's participation. In such contexts, grassroots organizations represent electoral constituencies who legitimize local officials, and to support the authorities to leverage resources from national agencies. For grassroots groups, the benefits of strategic alliances with local authorities consist of the ability to influence development plans and budgets, as well as obtaining political accountability. Yet another policy trend is the increasing convergence of DRR, climate change adaptation and social protection mechanisms that incorporate a DRR component in conditional or unconditional resource transfers for the poor.<sup>9</sup>

Grassroots women's organizations are focused on empowerment, raising consciousness, and addressing structural marginality. This often means that women work alongside men to achieve results for the community. Contrary to the common misconception that grassroots woman's initiatives are small, isolated, and unsustainable, the organizations from Asia, Latin American, the Caribbean, and Africa represented in this chapter have sustained, diversified and scaled up their development practices. In some cases the grassroots organizations have been steadily advancing their practices over a decade or more. In others, the practices and partnerships are more recent. However, with the right kind of support, women are shifting their status from passive recipients to active collaborators with local, national and regional authorities. But these examples remain on the periphery of formal programs; they are exceptions rather than the norm.

While the case examples are organized by each of the five HFA priorities, for the purpose of analysis, it is evident that each grassroots organization is advancing multiple HFA priorities. Not all cases are explicitly linked to DRR, however, all of them have implications for reducing community vulnerabilities.

## **HFA 1 - Ensure that disaster risk reduction is a national and local priority with a strong institutional basis for implementation**

Historically, structural barriers have impeded grassroots women's public involvement in designing, planning, and implementing activities that address vulnerabilities of marginalized groups, poor people, and women-headed households. However, there is substantial evidence to show that disasters often breakdown these barriers and enable women to undertake new public roles on behalf of their communities. In post-earthquake Turkey and India, women transformed their desperate situations into development opportunities via the facilitation of grassroots women's organizations (see examples from SSP's work in Maharashtra and KEDV's work in Istanbul).

In order to scale up grassroots women's activities to operationalize HFA 1, two kinds of mechanisms have to be in place:

1. Engagement mechanisms that link grassroots women's priorities and initiatives local and national government and their decision making processes
2. Formal institutional arrangements that recognize and resource grassroots women's roles in advancing resilience.

### Ongoing regional multi-stakeholder dialogue involving grassroots women's organizations

**Central America:** Acknowledging that gender dimensions of disaster risk reduction is a mandate which they have yet to adequately address, CEPREDENAC, the Central American inter-governmental body for disaster prevention and response, has been convening national disaster management agencies, women's ministries, environment ministries and grassroots women's organizations to jointly develop DRR strategies. This kind of multi-stakeholder engagement is quite rare. It provides grassroots organizations in Nicaragua, Guatemala and Honduras opportunities to engage their respective national government agencies in charge of food security, environment, agriculture and planning. In January 2010 CEPREDENAC invited grassroots organizations to review and make review its national strategies for DRR activities in 2011.

### Government mandates and programs to engage women as problem solvers

**India:** The state government of Maharashtra formally engaged community based organizations in the rebuilding process after a devastating earthquake in Latur-Osmanabad region in 1993. The World Bank-supported MEERP (Maharashtra Emergency earthquake Rehabilitation Programme) was established with a mandate to involve earthquake-affected population in the rehabilitation process. Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP) was entrusted with improving community participation in the Repair and Strengthening program in 1,300 villages and 200,000 households. After re-activating *Mahila Mandals* (women's collectives), 300 women leaders were appointed by the government as *Samvad Sahayaks* (village communication assistants). They facilitated coordination between officials, learned about materials, designs, and constructions methods, as well as forming community-resource teams to facilitate village meeting to redress grievances, contract labor, and developed study tours for model houses. They also monitored house construction to ensure that earthquake safety features were incorporated in rehabilitated houses (Gopalan 2009, UNISDR 2007a, Yonder et al. 2005).

**Guatemala:** During the food crisis in 2009, National Secretary of Food Security and Nutrition (SESAN) of Guatemala declared that approximately 690 communities (327,000 people) were at very high or high risk of hunger and malnutrition. SESAN has requested

grassroots leaders from Fundacion Guatemala, Comite de Emergencia Garifuna (Honduras) and Cooperative Las Brumas (Nicaragua) to hold trainings for 57 communities on sustainable agriculture. Resilience building methods included seed banks, tool banks, organic fertilizers, and suspended community gardens. Trainings also focus on helping women build strategic alliances with local government for sustainable development.

#### National and City Level Agreements for Government-Grassroots Collaborations

**Philippines:** In Bicol region, urban poor federations represented by women-led Bicol Urban Poor Coordination Council is a central stakeholder in the Cities Sharing Mechanism, a multi-stakeholder planning mechanism that brings urban poor federations together with NGOs and local government units (LGU). In 2008, local governments signed an agreement naming people's organizations, informal sector, producers groups, etc. as stakeholders in planning. It also commits the authorities to address good governance, secure tenure, gender mainstreaming and the integration of disaster risk reduction into their shelter and urban development plans. A "tripartite" covenant was signed by LGUs, NGOs, and people's organizations to strengthen a dialogue mechanism that has been functioning in Bicol since 1989.

**Jamaica:** Construction Resource and Development Centre (CRDC) in Jamaica has partnered with the Ministry of Water and Housing, to design and implement pilot projects for the Rural Water and Sanitation Program and as trainer and facilitator in the UN Habitat Participatory Slum Upgrading Program. CRDC has also partnered with the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management (ODPEM), National Housing Trust, the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Response Agency, and the National Climate Change Committee. In addition, the local authorities of St. Thomas and Portmore are currently working with CRDC to develop and operationalize a framework for resilient cities.

#### Political contracts with elected officials to promote community resilience priorities

**Indonesia:** In Makassar, the provincial capital of South Sulawesi, Indonesia, Komite Perjuangan Rakyat Miskin (KPRM), a women-led network of urban poor from 14 sub-districts signed a 'political contract' with a mayoral candidate for support of pro-poor agendas. Together with Uplink, a national network, KPRM mobilized 65,000 people to leverage votes for this pro-poor mayoral candidate during the 2008 election. After the candidate won, the new mayor has been working with the urban poor on issues of evictions, land and housing tenure, education and health services, participatory and pro-poor city planning and budgeting, and support for the city's street vendors and informal businesses (ACHR 2009). KPRM has also accessed health funds from city government. Since 2010, the organization is working closely with the mayor to draw up guidelines to disseminate disaster management information in schools; to involve the private sector in financing urban development; plan *kampung* (settlements) restructuring with integrated disaster response; and strengthen partnerships by setting up Makassar Community Alliance for Disaster Response (SIAGA).

**Peru:** In El Augustino municipality of Lima, electoral candidates signed agreements with community-based organizations (CBOs) before elections to honor the local agenda prioritized during district and zonal meetings. Through monitoring and surveillance from an organized working group of CBOs and with advice from the NGO Educational Services El Augustino (SEA), the district municipality is conducting regular public hearings to promote accountability. This allows grassroots priorities such as protecting the environment and reducing disaster risks to stay on the city government's agenda (HC 2010a).

### Decentralized budget allocations in response to grassroots women's priorities

**Nicaragua:** Union de Cooperativas de Produccion Agrícola Las Brumas (hereafter Las Brumas) initiated a community mapping process in which they identified vulnerabilities to flooding and heavy rain. They presented a list of priorities such as the need for roofing, roads, sanitation, health services for women, and productive assets to local governments. Through dialogues that followed, Las Brumas was able to develop a formal partnership with Municipality of Wiwili, which signed a resolution to set aside 5% of its budget to address grassroots priorities. The group received seeds for setting up seed banks that are essential for food and livelihoods security.

**Peru:** As a result of negotiations between grassroots women's network GROOTS Peru and local authorities of El Augustino in Lima, the municipality was able to access approximately USD43,000 from national funds in order to build an embankment to reduce flooding. Grassroots women will oversee the construction of this embankment (see full description under HFA 4 Community Resilience Fund).

### Local to Local Dialogues

A Local-to-Local Dialogue is a methodology that enables grassroots members to prioritize their issues, analyze the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders and engage local authorities to ensure that issues are resolved in a transparent and accountable manner. It differs from stakeholder meetings and community consultations where the community is brought into the process after needs and issues have been identified by government agencies and civil society actors. Such consultations can result in a solution to a particular issue, but frequently, agreements are not followed up and/or the relationships between the community and the partners are not sustained.

**Tanzania:** Maasai Women Development Organization (MWEDO) successfully utilized local-to-local dialogues in Simanjiro and Longido districts to engage local leaders. The dialogues cultivate a deeper understanding of the issues women face on their access to and control over land in their pastoralist society. MWEDO leaders also engage community women in political processes. Through the Village Land Act, local leaders granted land tenure letters to over 250 women in Longido, effectively guaranteeing their control over land. Traditional authorities also agreed to enforce new community agreements, such as abandoning traditional customs and practices that deny Maasai women's public participation and access to property.

## **HFA 2 - Identify, assess and monitor disaster risk and enhance early warning**

With over-emphasis on producing technological and scientific knowledge, not enough investment has focused on how information is conveyed, how people understand it, and what kind of actions are needed to prevent deaths, injuries, and loss of property and livelihoods. Often, national governments and technical research organization extract information from communities about risks but rarely bring gathered information back to communities.

For HFA 2 to be implemented effectively for people living in poor and marginalized communities, there must be recognition that knowledge of risks and the capacity to monitor need to come from the grassroots level. For communities often possess the skills, context-specific knowledge, and networks that can generate local solutions for early warning. Examples illustrated here are also applicable to Community Action Research featured in HFA 3.



### Community-led risk mapping as a tool for mobilizing, agenda setting and actions

**Jamaica:** Construction Development and Resource Center (CDRC) facilitated a community mapping process in Mt. Vernon, one of the poorest communities in St. Thomas. Participants realized that during periods of heavy rain, floods block their access to and from their homes. Through a local-to-local dialogue process, the community reached a consensus that they would advocate for footbridges. They succeeded in negotiating the government to pay for materials for four footbridges for which community provided labor.

**Philippines:** As part of the expansion of Community Resilience Fund (see HFA 4) demonstrations initiated in late 2010, DAMPA a federation of 95 urban poor community based organizations working in Metro Manila led a community risk and vulnerability mapping process. Nine grassroots organizations mobilized more than 5,000 of their constituents, undertake risk mapping, identify priorities and take action. The main vulnerabilities identified were the absence or fragility of livelihoods options, insecure tenure coupled with the threat of evictions, poor access to basic services and vulnerabilities caused by settlement locations along creeks and river banks. In terms of resources, they identified their federation, partnership with government officials, savings, access to credit, experience working together on emergency response and successful negotiations with city government as strengths. The mapping process and findings catalyzed negotiations with local authorities and other stakeholders for secure housing options.

### Mapping women's access to resources and services

While mapping resources and services do not explicitly focus on risk and vulnerability, results of such mapping exercises led by women have catalyzed collective actions to improve access to resources and services which are linked to reducing community vulnerability to disaster and climate change.

### **Key features of grassroots-led risk mapping**

One of the main differences between a top-down hazard mapping and grassroots led-risk mapping is that the former often regards the exercise as an end in itself.

Through mapping, grassroots women's groups are raising awareness of disaster risks and mobilizing communities to identify priorities. It is an entry point for groups to engage authorities in resilience building activities such as food security, sanitation, land tenure, etc. This affirms women's role as knowledge holders, trainers, and community organizers.

A leader in grassroots-led risk mapping in Central America and the Caribbean is Construction Resource and Development Centre (CDRC), the organization has been working to involve women in shelter and construction activities since 1984. Since the devastation of Hurricanes Gilbert and Hugo in 1988 and 1989, CDRC has been working with local communities in risk mapping (UNISDR 2007a).

Carmen Griffiths of CDRC explains that community hazard mapping is about putting community information into a picture and helping communities to collectively understand the 'big picture.'

She makes a strategic point by saying, "When people don't know how to articulate their own priorities outsiders tell them what they should do." In other words, having an information base owned by communities is key to their agenda setting and development process. CDRC uses a triangulation process to verify information in the community maps and have trained hundreds of women to led mapping workshops inside and outside of Jamaica.

**Uganda:** In a land mapping process in Jinja, Uganda, Slum Women's Initiative for Development (SWID) leaders and the grassroots leaders they work with identified an overwhelming amount of corruption in land distribution and widespread denial of women's rights to land. This led to the establishment of savings clubs and rotating loan schemes so that grassroots women can make housing mortgage payments and establish credit with banks. Many women can now purchase land, access land titles and develop their land.

**India:** In Nagapattinam and Cuddalore districts of Tsunami-hit Tamil Nadu, grassroots women identified risks, problems and costs related to community health and sanitation. They found that settlements had poor sanitation and waste management systems. In addition, women neglected their health problems, and community members tend to use private rather than public health clinics, thus adding to the financial stress of poor households. The mapping process mobilized women's health groups to organize health camps and form partnerships with government-run clinics to improve health service delivery.

### **HFA 3 - Use knowledge, innovation and education to build a culture of safety and resilience at all levels**

The issue of knowledge and education in disaster risk reduction has focused primarily upon outreach to the formal educational system and the curriculum. One area that has been overlooked is social learning in communities. Research findings prove that people are better at adopting new technologies or change cropping patterns through information flows in social networks (World Bank 2010: Chapter 2). Tapping grassroots knowledge and innovations to advance HFA 3 requires recognizing and investing in grassroots women as knowledge holders and facilitating their roles as trainers and teachers.

For decades, grassroots women's organizations' vehicles of learning and knowledge dissemination are experience sharing, public speaking, resource sharing, and coalition building. They see enormous potentials in using their organized groups and social networks as a platform for information collection, dissemination, and planning in a variety of development sectors.

#### Formal recognition of grassroots women as trainers

**Guatemala:** Impressed by grassroots women's organizations who had conducted their own risk mapping, CONRED (National Disaster Management Agency in Guatemala) asked grassroots women to train government officials responsible for advising local authorities. CONRED also agreed to include grassroots women in emergency preparedness and response training and formally certify them as trainers.

**Honduras:** Comité de Emergencia Garífuna, SEPLAN (Planning Ministry) and the Municipality of San Juan de Flores, Cantarranas organized a two-day training for 25 municipal officials. The training was led by 3 grassroots leaders from Honduras and 1 from Nicaragua with the support of the head of Fundación Guatemala. Over two days, the group made a hazard map, analyzed it, and developed a framework for resilience building and presented practical mechanisms and strategies being used to build local resilience. Since this training, DIPECHO has approached Fundación Guatemala to replicate the same methodology used in Cantarranas to train municipal officials in Livingston.

### Women-led peer exchanges to transfer and scale up risk reduction practices

**LAC Region:** This case example illustrates how trainers from Jamaica disseminated community-led risk mapping strategies to women leaders in Honduras, Guatemala, and Peru. In July 2008, Construction Resource and Development Center (CRDC) held a “Community Hazard Mapping Exchange” in Trujillo, Honduras. Twenty-eight community leaders from Guatemala, Nicaragua and Honduras comprising mostly of women learned to prepare a risk map of Guadalupe, a small hurricane prone coastal town. After returning to Nicaragua, participants from Las Brumas trained 5 women from their network to run risk-mapping workshops. They also reached out to women in the Mesquite Coast, and partnered with women to form emergency response teams. Several weeks after the July 2008 workshop, the original host in Honduras, Comite de Emergencia Garifuna, shared the mapping strategy with three grassroots women leaders from Red de Mujeres Lima Este (Network of Organized Women in East Lima) from Peru.

**Turkey:** Following the Marmara earthquake in 1999, the Foundation for Women’s Work (Kadin Emegini Degerlendirme Vakfi - KEDV) worked with grassroots women to create women and children centers. First establishing them in tents during the relief phase, then in temporary and permanent settlements. These centers became vibrant demonstrations of multipurpose spaces that fostered women’s active roles as public information managers, service providers, and negotiators in advancing women’s agendas for recovery. From 300 women organized after the earthquake the centers reached out to more than 10,000 women by 2005. From the first 9 centers in the earthquake-affected area, they are now operational in more than 20 locations across the country. Women leaders from the first centers also initiated the first women’s housing cooperative in Turkey. Cooperative leaders have since mobilized their peers to create a network of 60 women’s cooperatives across the country. The centers represent a robust learning network led by grassroots women with connections to local and national authorities (see also KEDV-facilitated recovery activities in HFA 5).

**India:** Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP) initiated a series of peer exchanges in disaster-affected areas in Tamil Nadu between women survivors of the tsunami and previous disasters in Maharashtra and Gujarat. The latter transferred strategies to support women's leadership to take public roles and to advance community priorities in the recovery process. Women from Tamil Nadu subsequently formed Arogyasakhis, Sanitation, Health, Awareness and Action (ASHAA) groups as an entry point to shape post-disaster recovery into ongoing development.

### **Peer learning exchanges as a key grassroots learning mechanism**

Peer exchanges give grassroots women the space and support to affirm, refine, and share knowledge and skills. Exchanges between people from poor communities provide a channel for direct, rapid transfer of ideas, strategies, and options. Through an experiential learning platform, solutions that have proved effective in one location become the building blocks for scaling up regionally or across nations. To be effective, horizontal exchanges need to be on-site learning, unfiltered from the source. According to Asian Coalition for Housing Rights (ACHR), exchanges represent “a collective commitment of organizations of the poor to communicate with each other, to examine their problems, set priorities and explore solutions, to use each other as allies. Then to evaluate these solutions, refine them and spread them around. ...[It is] where teaching and learning from each other becomes natural... and where sharing things strengthens self-worth. Exchange is the root strategy for education and mobilization -- of the poor and by the poor” (ACHR 2000).

Their network of 4,000 grassroots women, who focus on improving health, water and sanitation needs and have their own community health insurance fund is now part of a network of 72,000 women organized as federations of self-help groups across 3 Indian states.

#### Grassroots Academies on Resilience for learning, agenda-setting and advocacy

Huairou Commission and GROOTS International pioneered the Grassroots Academy as a peer learning and agenda-setting platform for grassroots women. In an intensive workshop setting, grassroots women leaders share knowledge and skills that they have been using in their own communities. They also use the Grassroots Academy to collectively analyze political context in which they work, strengthen their networks and develop common learning and advocacy agendas. While grassroots women are the primary participants, other civil society actors and government representatives may be invited to bridge key partnerships and opportunities.

**South and Southeast Asia:** In Cebu City, a regional grassroots academy in October 2008 enabled 80 women from more than 12 countries to appreciate the importance of DRR strategies. Through discussions and site visits, the group came to understand that DRR is embedded in many grassroots women's efforts to secure housing, infrastructure and livelihoods for their communities. This academy led to the formation of sub-regional networks in Southeast Asia and South Asia. Subsequently, grassroots leaders in South Asia held a similar sub-regional academy at which they launched their own network on resilience, consolidated their experiences and examined their inventory of rural and urban community funds, which could be accessed by grassroots groups to advance their local priorities.

#### Community Action Research

Community Action Research is used by grassroots organizations to understand community realities and mobilize stakeholders to take action. Unlike professional-led research projects, these community action-research initiatives ensure that knowledge and research techniques remain in the community, rather than leave with the professionals.

**Uganda:** SWID supported a team of 40 community researchers led by 26 women (plus 14 youths) to survey 400 households in 8 parishes. This resulted in helping grassroots leaders to understand the demographics of the communities and strategies for coping with the food crises. They found that 66% of households surveyed grew food only for consumption. However, their ability to continue to do so is threatened by environmental destruction and evictions due to commercialization, rise in food prices, high levels of corruption, lack of transparency in government programs and communities being evicted from the lands they were cultivating on. The findings from this survey are currently being used as the basis for designing a strategy scaling up community strategies to address food insecurity.

**Global:** "Women's Views from the Frontline" is an action-research on the local implementation of HFA initiated by Huairou Commission and undertaken in partnership with the Global Network of Civil Society Organizations. In total, 23 grassroots organizations from 13 countries participated through focus group discussions and interviews, reaching out to 1181 people. The survey was instrumental in introducing the HFA to grassroots women who learned that governments have signed global agreements to take action to prevent disasters. As a result, Lumanti Support Group in Nepal convened a training workshop that included NGO stakeholders, community leaders, government and local authorities and held a local-to-local dialogue. Similarly in the Philippines, local authorities in Manila began a dialogue with DAMPA, a federation of 95 grassroots organizations of urban poor, to identify a collaborative initiative to address DRR in urban poor communities. In India, grassroots women's reported

that the survey gave women an opportunity to critically evaluate their own efforts to build resilience and plan the way forward. They identified the need to reduce deforestation, diversify and upgrade livelihoods and strengthen village level response teams as key priorities.

## **Grassroots Women transferring resilience practices in Post-disaster contexts**

*How disaster survivors from Maharashtra and Gujarat assisted in rehabilitation and reconstruction in in Tsunami affected villages in Tamil Nadu*

Three weeks after the tsunami in 2004, a group of poor women villagers, who are survivors of the 1993 and 2001 earthquakes in Latur (Maharashtra) and Kutch (Gujarat), traveled to Tamil Nadu to show their solidarity with women like themselves. With facilitation from Swayam Shikshan Prayog - SSP (a Mumbai-based NGO) and the Covenant Center for Development (a Tamil Nadu-based NGO), the women visited 13 villages in the two worst affected districts, Nagapattinam and Cuddalore. They talked with survivors, shared stories and organized meetings with women's groups, youth groups and fishermen's cooperatives; they identified ways to support the villages' long-term housing and livelihood rehabilitation programs.

Several key concepts in the team's community driven rehabilitation strategy are:

- Forming village development committees of women's groups and other community institutions to manage the rehabilitation and to monitor disaster-safe reconstruction.
- Making financial and technical assistance within easy reach of affected communities.
- Defining clear roles for local government in the areas of planning, monitoring, problem solving, infrastructure development and disaster safety.
- Using local skills and labor and including women in all aspects of reconstruction.

Communities have proved to possess the capacity to build disaster-resistant housing. In Poompuhar, a fishing village in Nagapattinam District, SSP facilitated a replicable, participatory process to construct decent, affordable, disaster-safe houses that meet the complex needs of the families who will live in them.

In addition, leaders of women's self help groups from Maharashtra organized a series of meetings with small groups of affected families to discuss and prioritize all aspects of house design. With engineering support from technical partner technical partner, the Dehra Dun-based People's Science Institute (PSI), the villagers' house design gradually evolved. The final model was miles away from the government-sponsored concrete box, and included the following elements:

- disaster-safe design features for earthquake / cyclone safety
- extra-strong "core room" to safeguard life and assets
- taller structure with external stair case to escape to roof during floods
- flat concrete slab roof allows for future expansion upwards
- rainwater harvesting facility with storage
- toilet and bathroom entered from outside
- low-cost ferro cement roofs for kitchen, toilets and veranda
- traditional "vastu" considerations incorporated in the design.

To demonstrate earthquake and cyclone safe-building techniques, SSP then organized a 4-day "hands-on" training program for 17 local masons, with local women watching and taking part, so they can later supervise the rebuilding of their own houses (ACHR 2005).

## HFA 4 - Reduce the underlying risk factors

Recognizing that vulnerability is multi-dimensional and that a community's asset base consists of interlinked resources such as physical, financial, human, social, and natural capital, asset building is regarded as a holistic approach to address underlying risk factors to disasters and climate change. Asset accumulation strategies enhance, diversify, and consolidate the asset base of households. More importantly, assets can be transferred to the next generation, which is instrumental to long-term improvement of individuals and households (see discussion and references in Chapter II). The following examples illustrate how grassroots women have built assets in a variety of sectors to reduce their vulnerabilities.

### Community institutions for securing community assets

One key area in reducing women's vulnerabilities concerns their relationship to land. Women's ownership of land is a key element of a highly diversified livelihood strategy and a crucial part of reducing vulnerabilities of women, their families and their communities. Access to land is key to women's ability to grow crops for consumption or selling. Women's access to livelihoods, their ability to secure food, use sustainable agricultural techniques and preserve indigenous food crops often dependent on their ability to access and control land.

**Kenya:** Founded by home-based caregivers in Kenya in 2005, a community watchdog program was an urgent measure to address evictions of widows and children due to AIDS-related illness or death in the family. GROOTS Kenya facilitated the training of community watchdogs to be paralegals, together with concerned community members such as elders, chiefs and councilors, the groups monitor cases of women's dispossession and raise alarm in instances of eviction and act to stop them. The watchdog model has been replicated in 16 communities across 4 regions in Kenya. The government of Kenya has acknowledged the success of Watchdog Group model at the local level and is using the groups as a mobilizing platform on issues of women and property rights. To date, 60 provincial administrators are working directly with 13 of the 16 Watchdog Groups, many have formally recognized the groups as partners to local government agencies. Watchdog programs are also being replicated in Cameroon, Ghana and Nigeria (GLTN 2007, Okech 2008).

**India:** In Maharashtra state, Sakhi Women's Federation in Osmanabad district mapped food supply chains to understand their community's food insecurity. Noting unsustainable factors such as increasing costs of vegetables, depleting nutritional levels in families, and over reliance on cash crops, grassroots women became vegetable producers by learning techniques from older knowledge-holders in a nearby village. They negotiated with families and or men to set aside a plot of land exclusively to be farmed by women. Godavari Dange, leader of the federation explained, "We have defied gender norms that prevent women from owning land or keeping the income from the products they farmed. We have been able to negotiate with our husbands for 1 acre of land per plot to farm vegetables." Their success with farming has led to Krishi Vigyan Kendras (government agricultural research and training centers) to agree to train women in agricultural technologies (such as soil testing). Women's organic vegetable farming collective currently includes 550 women with control over more than 1,000 acres of land across 35 villages.

**Brazil:** In the semi-arid region of Bahia, Rede Pintadas, a network of 11 community based organizations working in partnership with government, initiated by local women, have worked for 20 years to develop a series of community institutions to advance a holistic approach to combating drought and poverty. Among these institutions is a credit cooperative bank that provides a source of credit for the community who previously had to travel 60 miles to access the closest bank. Among the many initiatives led by the Women's Association of

Pintadas is a drought management program through which communities have constructed household cisterns for rainwater harvesting for domestic use and large water tanks and community ponds for harvesting water for agricultural use. In addition the Women's Association promotes a food security strategy that encourages poor families to cultivate and use local, traditional food crops to stretch the small allowances they access as part of the *Bolsa Familia*. Today a major accomplishment of the Pintadas network is that their municipality is 100% water self-sufficient. Their champion in the state government has since promoted a state level program that is scaling up the Pintadas' water harvesting strategy across the state of Bahia.

**India:** A Community Based Health Mutual Fund was launched in 2006 to hold health providers accountable, raise awareness, and address the health needs of the community in Maharashtra state. 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. Grassroots women's leaders mobilize members in the community to participate in the fund (through education and awareness raising) and work with health care providers (both public and private) for them to provide health care at cost to members. This fund is a solidarity effort, improving resilience by empowering women to take proactive control over the health of themselves and their families, while institutionalizing partnerships with government officials to ensure that resource mobilization is improved and accessible to members of the communities involved (HC 2010b).

### Community Resilience Fund

In 2007, at the Global Platform on DRR, GROOTS International and Huairou Commission called for global funds to be channeled directly to local communities to enable them to demonstrate their capacities to address local resilience priorities. In late 2008 the Community Resilience Fund (CRF) was launched in 5 countries (India, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Peru) to enable experienced grassroots organizations to:

- Experiment with grassroots-led solutions to address locally identified risks and priorities
- Build stakeholder platforms to link local priorities and practices to national agendas
- Link and leverage resources from poverty, development, social protection, DRR and adaptation programs.

In addition to the examples below, women's efforts from Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua discussed in previous sections have been initiated and are being scaled up through the Community Resilience Fund.

In the second phase that started in 2010, the CRF is expanded to reach 7 more countries and supports the scaling up of the initiatives from the five countries in the first phase. It is formally endorsed by the National Disaster Management Authority in India and by CEPREDENAC in Central America. Additional contribution comes from the South-South Program of the World Bank's Global Facility for Disaster Recovery and Resilience. Finally, the Presidential Secretariat of the Defender of Indigenous Women in Guatemala is collaborating with Fundacion Guatemala

### **Community Resilience Fund channels funds directly to grassroots women**

The CRF is more than a fund for community-focused resilience. It is a mechanism that enables flexible funds to be channeled to grassroots women's groups to develop innovative responses to local priorities. Furthermore, by locating these practices within processes that women's empowerment as well as linking the groups to the public decision making processes, the CRF continues to widen the scope and influence of grassroots women's resilience efforts.



and GROOTS International by contributing its own funds.

Despite the track record of grassroots organizations on advancing development priorities of their communities and the stated commitment to community driven strategies, there has been major resistance from institutional actors to put flexible, untied resources in the hands of community based organizations. In addition, there is a disproportionate amount of pressure upon grassroots organizations to deliver impacts and standardize operations. Below is a selection of CRF-supported accomplishments:

**India:** In Bihar, 25 women's savings and credit groups operating in 5 of the most vulnerable villages in Darbhanga district were selected to pilot the CRF. Facilitated by Kanchan Seva Ashram, these groups formed a CRF Committee that decided to use the funds to supplement their collective loan funds and to create revolving loans. Member groups could access the CRF in the form of loans to address livelihoods and food security by introducing multi-cropping and short-cycle food crops in order to cope with the increasingly unpredictable rainfall patterns. The CRF also enabled grassroots women to collectively lease farmland for the first time.. The fund is also instrumental in catalyzing network activities with other CRF recipients. This increase in visibility resulted improved community access to health services, low interest agricultural loans and improved infrastructure. In one village, the CRF committee successfully influenced the location of an embankment to prevent water logging and flooding in their fields. Due to their successes, neighboring villages are asking these grassroots women to replicate the resilience strategies in their villages.

**India:** In Andhra Pradesh, fisher women's federations in West Godavari district adopted a multi-pronged approach to secure their incomes and livelihoods. They formally registered their organizations in order to access government resources and represent themselves in decision making forums. They organized a training 1,350 fisherwomen from 21 villages on fish processing, safe water and sanitation. A key element of the federations has been planting shelter belts and regenerating mangrove forests to protect the coastal ecology. NGO partner, Sanghamitra Service Society is negotiating with the state forestry department to provide land for shelterbelt, mangrove coastal afforestation and funds from the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme to support poor households involved in afforestation initiative.

**Peru:** After mapping their communities, GROOTS Peru for presented their analysis and proposals for resilience building in 8 zones of El Augustino municipality to the Local Government Committee for Local Economic Development, the mayor supported a reforestation initiative in which 15,000 tara wood trees covering 7,800 meters were planted. 120,000 Peruvian Sols (43,000 USD) was allocated to the municipal budget of El Augustino to construct an embankment. Through its regular networking and advocacy efforts GROOTS Peru was able to engage INDECI (national disaster management authority) and CAPRADE (Andean regional disaster management agency), Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning & Environment. Through their advocacy they have obtained letters of commitment from authorities from 6 districts agreeing to work collaboratively. GROOTS Peru has also formed watchdog groups to monitor the implementation of decentralized funds which the federal government is allocating to local authorities specifically for DRR.

**Nicaragua:** Based on community risk mapping, Las Brumas initiated a series of negotiations with local and national government. As a result, 142 families received replacement roofs through the Housing Ministry, and 85 families received toilets. Further advocacy led to repair of a 30 km footbridge. As a mechanism to advance women's interests in local government,

Las Brumas successfully advocated for a "gender desk" inside the municipality. Three women are now part of local gender committees so they can monitor progress on institutional responses to women's interests. a new decentralization law that provides a budget and a mandate to implement DRR locally.

**Honduras:** In the first phase of its CRF work in 2008, Comité de Emergencia Garífuna trained more than 60 women to undertake risk and vulnerability mapping in their communities. They used the risk maps to negotiate with local government to improve infrastructure and align local plans and budgets to the needs of poor communities. Due to the group's sustained advocacy at local, regional and global levels, Comité's work has been recognized by CEPREDENAC (Central American inter-governmental body for disaster prevention and response) and led to Comité's participation in planning meetings with SEPLAN (Honduras's planning ministry), COPECO (national disaster management agency) and DIPECO (Disaster Preparedness program of the European Commission), to evaluate and coordinate the activities of different ministries. Subsequently, the Mayor of Cantarranas and San Juan de Flores requested Comité to train municipal workers on the local implementation of the HFA, including how to work with local communities on coordinating emergency responses. Comité has also signed a memorandum of understanding with the Honduran government to access programs on housing and food security. This is the first time a grassroots women's group has been given special status as an expert with the ability to provide resilience training. Comité has negotiated with the Housing Ministry for the construction of 100 homes in Trujillo, and 200 homes for Rio Esteban, and Santa Rosa de Aguan.

**Philippines:** Community mapping process in Metro Manila involving more than 5,000 men and women organized by DAMPA (discussed in HFA 2), catalyzed a series of negotiations by 3 community based organizations working with the urban poor. PACOMNA, from Barangay 275, identified the lack of water supply as their topmost concern. PACOMNA's women leaders then mobilized their constituents to use opportunities such as elections and workshops to engage local authorities and advocate for water supply. Later, the community organized themselves as a water cooperative and obtained a loan from DAMPA to pay for water connections in the neighborhoods. In Navotas city, community leaders negotiated with the mayor to give land tenure to communities being resettled in situ and to ensure that community representatives are present at inter-agency meetings to plan the resettlement. The two sides also jointly agreed to plan a City DRR Platform. Communities living on the major water pipes in Manila organized a multi-stakeholder dialogue convening urban poor representatives with a Congressman, Manila Water and Sewerage System, local authorities, contractors and the Public Prosecutor's office to successfully negotiate a temporary halt to evictions and demolitions and look at multiple resettlement options.

## **HFA 5 - Strengthen disaster preparedness for effective response at all levels**

The fifth HFA priority for action addresses the area that is the most well-established and well-funded component of DRR in national and international programs. Not only are grassroots women's groups excluded from emergency programs (see findings from HC 2009b), their community-based strategies are not part of standard operating procedures in early recovery programs after disasters.

Evidence indicates that when women are organized to help distribute aid during post-disaster situations, they are often able to ensure the elderly, children, and the weak receive necessary

relief (Yonder et al. 2005). As International Federation Red Cross points out: “The locals are the ones who can bring any effective help in the first few hours, and it is their capacity that has to be strengthened. This is less heroic than flying in after the event” (IFRC 2001).

While there are many excellent initiatives that spread effective messages of disaster preparedness and training (UNISDR 2008a, Enarson 2009b), the following are case examples that demonstrate the capacity of grassroots women to lead people-centered strategies for disaster preparedness and response.

#### Gender-balanced emergency response teams and trainers

**India:** In Andhra Pradesh, Sanghamitra Service Society facilitated a network of community trainers for emergency preparedness and response called Sanghamam. After overcoming initial resistance to including women in the task forces, every one of the 60 cyclone-prone villages now has equal number of men and women in emergency response and contingency planning teams, which adds up to approximately 1,500 community members. The trainings provided by Sanghamam are financially supported by NGOs and government agencies that invite them. Sanghamam members report that the GROOTS Community Trainers Initiative focusing on building the capacity of grassroots women trainers resulted in an increase in self-confidence and public recognition. The women’s increased contact with local government as a result of their training roles has enabled these grassroots women to negotiate for land as well as food rations. In sum, the women emergency response trainers added community advocacy to their public roles.

#### Women-managed spaces accelerate post-disaster recovery

Women-managed spaces where women can organize collective action for early recovery and address community development priorities a strategy that fosters their leadership and organizing skills. Despite the success of this strategy in promoting women’s safety and fostering women’s mutual support and active involvement in disaster response and recovery, this strategy has not been formalized as part of standard disaster response and recovery protocols for addressing gender concerns.

**Turkey and Indonesia:** Providing a safe space for women to support each other has proven to be an effective instrument to address gender dynamics. In post-earthquake Turkey, Kadin Emegini Degerlendirme Vakfi (KEDV), which translates to Foundation for the Support of Women's Work, set up new tents as women’s centers and children’s spaces in donated shipping containers. Within days, local women began to organize themselves, made new friends, and held small support-group sessions. Eventually, these spaces became the locus of income-generating and recovery activities (see also KEDV-facilitated recovery activities in HFA 3).

When KEDV shared their experiences with post-disaster counterparts from disaster hit communities in Yogyakarta and Aceh in Indonesia, the grassroots women leaders identified the need for a physical space for women to gather and organize themselves as a key priority. The women emphasized the need for such a space in which they could leave their children in order to participate in meetings (UNISDR 2007a: 51-54).

**India:** At the concluding phase of Maharashtra's post-earthquake Repair and Strengthening program facilitated by SSP, the women requested the establishment of independent women’s information centers that they could manage and control. These were envisioned as public spaces that grassroots women from a cluster of 5 to 10 nearby villages could use as an information and learning center. From two initial pilot centers, these public women's information centers (*mahila mahiti kendras*) were replicated in 32 locations across the two

across the earthquake-affected districts of Latur and Osmanabad. To address the growing demand, SSP developed a template in which local women's groups were expected to identify and negotiate for the necessary land, provide the labor, a portion of the materials, and raise local funds. In return, SSP would match part of the construction cost and provide training in construction techniques (Gopalan 2009, UNISDR 2007, Yonder et al 2005).

### III. Conclusion

#### Rethinking Institutional Approaches to Women's Role in the Local Implementation of HFA

Examples discussed in this study demonstrate the remarkable capacity and leadership grassroots women have in building community resilience. Women's negotiations with local national and regional authorities are enabling communities to access resources, basic services and infrastructure, upgrade and secure housing, which affect their ability to reduce risk and vulnerability in the face of disaster. In addition to improving the quality of life in poor communities, grassroots women's organizations are renegotiating their status with decision makers and advancing their strategic interests.

Bilateral and multilateral agencies and other donors have clearly stated their commitment to advancing pro-poor, gender equitable disaster risk reduction. They have, for years, talked about promoting community participation and women's concerns as vehicles for grounding their strategies in local realities. The successful partnerships between grassroots women's organizations and government agencies described here are exceptions rather than the norm. They remain on the margins of formal programs rather than as benchmarks for gender-inclusive community engagement.

Operationalizing gender as a cross cutting issue and advancing grassroots women's role as agents of community resilience requires investing in pro-poor resilience building programs that reposition women as leaders. Too often, DRR and disaster recovery programs simply deliver aid or training to women in ways that reproduce rather than redress women's marginalization and vulnerabilities.

Given the impacts of climate change and the increasing unpredictability of disasters and shocks caused by economic crises, it is urgent that actors in this sector rethink their approach to local implementation of the HFA. Stakeholders need to have the political will to press their institutions to collaborate with grassroots women's organizations.

By their own account, institutions have not done well in terms of reducing long term vulnerability of poor communities or addressing women's vulnerabilities (World Bank IEG 2006). It is time to rethink our approach to empowering women to promote DRR.

The following are four key recommendations:

1. **Reverse the current design and planning of DRR processes by building on grassroots accomplishments.** Rather than designing DRR programs and seek the participation of women and communities afterwards, institutions should build on the accomplishments of community based organizations led by grassroots women as their starting point for DRR policies and programs. This would ensure the development of local resilience priorities and mobilize the capacities and leadership of local communities.
2. **Support grassroots women-led demonstrations as learning laboratories for grassroots women, NGOs, local authorities and governments.** Much of the investment in community based organizations and grassroots women's organizations is in the form of training. There is a need to go beyond this to facilitate grassroots-led demonstrations, which enable women to apply their knowledge, refine their practices and mobilize their networks and partners to scale up and institutionalize effective practices. Such

demonstrations should then inform new operational frameworks for joint planning, implementation and evaluation of pro-poor gender equitable DRR.

3. **Incentivize government and local authority's engagement with grassroots women's organizations.** Governments and donors should require and reward their institutions to collaborate with grassroots women's organizations. Such actions will formalize active public roles for women and set clear standards for engaging grassroots women's organizations.
4. **Set aside resources for grassroots women-led initiatives.** Grassroots women's organizations need flexible funds to identify locally appropriate entry points for DRR to mobilize communities, collaborate with local governments, and to experiment with innovative solutions to address local resilience priorities.

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## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> In World Disaster Report 2001, International Red Cross points out that out of 2,557 natural disasters between 1991 and 2000, two-thirds of the deaths occurred in countries with low Human Development Index (HDI), compared to 2% in the countries with a high HDI. See overviews in Pelling 2003, and Prowse and Scott 2008.

<sup>2</sup> By the turn of the millennium, international agencies began to link poverty with disaster risks (IFRC 2001, World Bank 2001, UNDP 2004).

<sup>3</sup> In total, leaders from 23 organizations in 13 countries in Latin America, the Caribbean, Asia, Africa, and the MENA region engaged a total of 1,181 women, 232 local government representatives, and 94 NGO representatives.

<sup>4</sup> “Gender-blind policies or programmes are potentially harmful to human development as they tend to exacerbate existing inequality or exclusion. Gender mainstreaming assesses the different implications of any planned action for men and women and pertains to legislation, policies or programmes in any area and at all levels. It is a strategy to make the concerns and experiences of men and women an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies, initiatives and programmes. When realized, it ensures that women and men benefit equally from the development process, thereby resulting in effective and sustainable policies and programmes. Rather than adding women’s participation to existing strategies and programmes, gender mainstreaming aims to transform unequal social and institutional structures in order to make them profoundly responsive to gender” (UNDP 2009). There are a number of analytical tools used in gender mainstreaming. See UNDP 2010, Box 5.6. See critique of gender mainstreaming in Cornwall et al. (2004).

<sup>5</sup> Twigg draws from M. Edwards and D. Hulme's "Scaling-up the Developmental Impact of NGOs: Concepts and Experiences" (1992) where he distinguishes 3 types of scaling: (1) additive strategies, which increase the size of a program or organization; (2) multiplicative strategies, which achieve greater impact through influence, networking, policy reform or training; (3) diffusive strategies, where the spread is informal and spontaneous.

<sup>6</sup> This is how Prowse and Scott summarize the difference as explained by Moser and Dani: “In contrast to the rather static provision of sectoral services to boost human capital (health, education) or physical capital (infrastructure), which are seen to provide the ‘foundations’ for self-propelled asset accumulation by individuals/households, a ‘second generation’ approach necessitates a dynamic perspective that responds to changing socioeconomic and political circumstances. Moser and Dani argue that in addition to policies that influence access to assets (such as asset transfers), policies and public action can improve returns on assets (e.g. through improving infrastructure and competition within markets), and radically alter the value of assets (through progressive judicial and institutional reforms)” (2008: 48).

<sup>7</sup> Krishna Vatsa (2004) cautions against equating poverty with vulnerability. He points out that anti-poverty programs can address economic deprivation, but it may increase vulnerability. On the other hand, disaster risk reduction may be accomplished without reducing poverty.

<sup>8</sup> The typology outlined by Shapan Adnan et al.'s People's participation: NGOs and the flood action plan (1992) are: passive participation, participation on information giving, participation by consultation, participation by material incentives, functional participation, interactive participation, and self-mobilization.

<sup>9</sup> See A. Arnall et. al.'s "Adaptive social protection: mapping the evidence and policy context in the agriculture sector in South Asia" (IDS, 2010).