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A Gender Approach to Vulnerability and Natural Disasters

By Ema Izquierdo

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of
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Abstract

A Gender Approach to Vulnerability and Natural Disasters

By Ema Izquierdo

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A natural disaster is a major adverse event resulting from natural processes of the earth that overwhelm local response and affect the social and economic development of the affected region. Natural disasters have been seen as situations that create challenges and difficulties mainly of a humanitarian nature. Still, progressively, it has come to be recognized that a gendered approach to humanitarian response is essential for vulnerable populations such as girls and women. Even though information about particular cases is scarce, evidence indicates that women are more likely to die after a natural disaster not because of biological reasons but because of gender norms that commonly forbid women's access to aid, food, and information

In this context, my research will focus in finding how the embedded cultural beliefs of humanitarian actors, and authorities, contribute to the failure to acknowledge the gender specific needs of the female population during the aftermath of a natural disaster. The cases of the earthquake and tsunami in the Indian Ocean in 2004, Hurricane Katrina in the Gulf Coast in 2005, and the earthquake in Haiti in 2010 will present an insight into the particular vulnerability that women endure.

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Definitions

CEDAW: The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women is an international treaty adopted in 1979 by the United Nations General Assembly. Described as an international bill of rights for women, it was instituted on 3 September 1981 and has been ratified by 188 states.

Disaster: A sudden event, such as an accident or a natural catastrophe, that causes great damage or loss of life.

Discrimination: Unfair or prejudicial treatment of different categories of people or things, especially on the grounds of race, age, or sex.

Gender: State of being male or female, typically used with reference to social and cultural differences rather than biological ones.

Gender Mainstreaming: Public policy concept of assessing the different implications for women and men of any planned policy action, including legislation and programs, in all areas and levels.

Human Rights: Privileges to all human beings, whatever our nationality, place of residence, sex, national or ethnic origin, color, religion, language, or any other status. These rights are all interrelated, interdependent and indivisible.

IASC: The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) is the primary mechanism for inter-agency coordination of humanitarian assistance in cases of emergency.

IFRC: The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) is the world's largest humanitarian network that reaches 150 million people in 189 National Societies through the work of over 17 million volunteers.

ISDR: International Strategy for Disaster Reduction. It brings many organizations, universities, and institutions together for a common objective: reducing the number of dead and injured by disasters triggered by natural hazards.

NGO: A non-governmental organization (NGO) is an organization that is neither a part of a government nor a conventional for-profit business. Usually set up by ordinary citizens, NGOs may be funded by governments, foundations, businesses, or private persons.

OECD: The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) is a unique forum where the governments of 34 democracies with market economies work with each other, as well as with more than 70 non-member economies to promote economic growth, prosperity, and sustainable development.

Poverty: Condition where people's basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter are not being met.

Recovery: is a process of change whereby individuals work to improve their own health and wellness and to live a meaningful life in a community of their choice while striving to achieve their full potential

UN: The United Nations (UN; French: Organisation des Nations unies; ONU) is an intergovernmental organization established 24 October 1945 to promote international co-operation.

UNICEF: The United Nations Children's Fund is a United Nations Program that provides long-term humanitarian and developmental assistance to children and mothers in developing countries.

Vulnerability: The diminished capacity of an individual or group to anticipate, cope with, resist and recover from the impact of a natural or man-made hazard.

CHAPTER I

Natural Disasters, Gender and Laws

Introduction

My research exposes the vulnerabilities of the female population in areas where natural disasters have struck in the past decades. Human rights are constantly violated due to patriarchal societies and social-constructed behaviors, which lead to a higher female mortality. Since humanitarian aid can't reach girls and women because of these disadvantages, the process of recovery is slow and uncertain.

It is clear that natural disasters disrupt the normal activities of men and women alike. But it is even more evident that the situation of women is much more problematic because of pre-existing gender factors that place them at a lower position in society because of their vulnerable image. Therefore, international treaties should be fully enforced in order to create a safer environment for girls and women.

Natural Hazards: Unavoidable Risks

In his book *Natural Disasters*, David C. Alexander states: "Natural catastrophes have the power to exert a substantial and consistent influence on modern society."¹ He defines a natural hazard as:

¹ Alexander, David. *Natural Disasters*. New York: Chapman & Hall, 1993. pp 3.

² Auffret, Philippe, and Carrie Turk. *High Consumption Volatility: The Impact of Natural*

- a. “A naturally occurring or man-made geologic condition or phenomenon that presents a risk or is a potential danger to life or property.” (American Geological Institute 1984);
- b. “An interaction of people and nature governed by the co-existent state of adjustment of the human use system and the state of nature in the natural events system.” (White 1973)
- c. “Those elements in the physical environment [which are] harmful to man and caused by forces extraneous to him.” (Burton and Kates 1964)
- d. “The probability of occurrence within a specified period of time and within a given area of a potentially damaging phenomenon” (United Nations Disaster Relief Organization)

The significance of these four definitions is that a natural hazard is a physical event that has a significant impact on human beings. Furthermore, natural hazards are extremely difficult to predict and they often have negative effects that could range from mild to catastrophic.² Further, a disaster not only occurs because natural hazards harm people, but damage also often happens as the result of social, political, and economic environments, and how life is structured among those circumstances.³

² Auffret, Philippe, and Carrie Turk. *High Consumption Volatility: The Impact of Natural Disasters?* Washington, D.C.: World Bank, Latin America and the Caribbean Region, Economic Policy Sector Unit, 2003. pp 15.

³ Unruh, Jon Darrel, Maarten S. Krol, and Nurit Kliot. *Environmental Change and Its Implications for Population Migration*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 2004. pp. 83.

Natural Disasters: The Human Factor of a Catastrophe

A natural disaster is a major adverse event resulting from natural processes of the earth; examples include floods, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, tsunamis, and other geologic processes.⁴ Areas affected by a natural disaster are prone to social and economic consequences that interrupt the normal lives of the population. Loss of lives, property damages, public health risks, poverty, and social discrimination are a few examples of possible outcomes of a natural disaster. Consequently, it depends on the severity of the disaster and how vulnerable the area affected was, to assess the resilience or ability to recover of the people affected.⁵

The distinction between *natural hazards* and natural disasters is that the former relates to any geophysical event, such as volcanic eruptions, floods, earthquakes or tsunamis, whereas *natural disasters* involve the interaction of natural hazards and social construction.⁶ For example, two societies might be exposed to similar natural hazards, but they might have different vulnerabilities that could determine their ability to recover from the hazard. Thus, hazards are essentially external threats, but the resulting disaster is the repercussion of internal liabilities; for example, inappropriate building and construction regulations.

Moreover, David C. Alexander discusses that a natural disaster can be defined as some “rapid, instantaneous, or profound impact of the natural environment upon the social-economic system,” and therefore, it can only be measured by the number of victims and the economic

⁴ Bankoff, Greg, Georg Frerks, and Thea Hilhorst. *Mapping Vulnerability: Disasters, Development, and People*. London: Earthscan Publications, 2004. pp. 16.

⁵ Blaikie, Piers M. *At Risk: Natural Hazards, People's Vulnerability, and Disasters*. London: Routledge, 1994. pp. 50.

⁶ Auffret, Philippe, and Carrie Turk. *High Consumption Volatility: The Impact of Natural Disasters?* Washington, D.C.: World Bank, Latin America and the Caribbean Region, Economic Policy Sector Unit, 2003. pp. 20.

damage it creates to the affected area, but certainly, there are many more important factors that are in need of study (i.e., vulnerability, discrimination, cultural beliefs).⁷

Vulnerability

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) defines vulnerability as “the diminished capacity of an individual or group to anticipate, cope with, resist, and recover from the impact of a natural or man-made hazard.”⁸ There are physical, economic, social, and political factors that can determine people’s level of vulnerability. Thus, these factors will or prevent a population capacity to recover from hazards. Clearly, poverty is a major contributor to vulnerability. Poor people are more likely to live and work in areas exposed to potential hazards, while they are less likely to have the resources to cope when a disaster strikes.

Philippe Auffret and Carrie Turk argue that disasters occur when societies are vulnerable to such natural hazards. In countries with healthier economies, there is a better and more efficient capacity to resist and overcome the impact of any possible danger. Since these countries have risk-management systems and preparedness, they are more prepared to face hazards; therefore, they will recover more quickly than poorer countries.⁹ Nonetheless, disasters endanger economies and growth. It is important to emphasize that the individual response and how

⁷ Alexander, David. *Natural Disasters*. New York: Chapman & Hall, 1993. pp. 4.

⁸ “What Is Vulnerability?” - IFRC. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. Web. <https://www.ifrc.org/en/what-we-do/disaster-management/about-disasters/what-is-a-disaster/what-is-vulnerability/>.

⁹ Auffret, Philippe, and Carrie Turk. *High Consumption Volatility: The Impact of Natural Disasters?* Washington, D.C.: World Bank, Latin America and the Caribbean Region, Economic Policy Sector Unit, 2003. pp. 13.

households and authorities respond to a potential hazard could increase or reduce the risk of disasters. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge vulnerabilities as the most important factor in the outcome of a disaster.

In the Policy Brief No. 29 of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), natural disasters are particularly considered a development issue, and it presents the following major reasons for this to happen: natural disasters disproportionately strike developing countries. Not all parts of the planet's surface are equally exposed to natural hazards.¹⁰

Furthermore, studies have shown that natural disasters are worse for the poor. A recent United Nations Development Program report notes that while only 11% of people exposed to natural hazards live in countries classified as “low-human-development” countries, these same countries account for more than 53% of disaster-related deaths. Poor countries are therefore not only more exposed, but they are also more vulnerable than rich ones, and the poorest people within them are the most vulnerable.¹¹ Poor people live in housing of poorer quality and often on marginal land; therefore, they don't have access to insurance, and savings accounts are not available if they are hit by a disaster. The poor cannot escape disaster zones because of lack of their own transportation and because of their fragile health.¹² Moreover, natural disasters can dampen economic growth by destroying capital and diverting resources toward relief and reconstruction. Natural disasters damage physical possessions, disintegrate families, and take

¹⁰ Policy Brief No. 29 of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

¹¹ Cutter, Susan, and Cosmin Coredea. “From Social Vulnerability to Resilience: Measuring Progress toward Disaster Risk Reduction.” SOURCE. 2013.

¹² According to Health Poverty Action, a British nongovernmental organization, marginalized groups and vulnerable individuals are often worst affected, deprived of information, money or access to health services that would help them prevent and treat disease.

away bodily and mental health.

Natural disasters are considered as development issues because development policy—both domestic and international—can credibly make a difference to lessen the impact on poverty, growth, and welfare. On the other hand, according to the IFRC, examples of potentially vulnerable groups are displaced populations who leave their habitual residence in collectives—usually due to a sudden impact disaster, such as an earthquake or a flood, threat, or conflict—as a coping mechanism and with the intent to return; migrants who leave or flee their habitual residence to go to new places, usually abroad to seek better and safer perspectives; returnees—former migrants or displaced people returning to their homes; specific groups within the local population, such as marginalized, excluded or destitute people; and young children, pregnant and nursing women, unaccompanied children, widows, elderly people without family support, and disabled persons.¹³

With this classification in mind, natural disasters can aggravate those existing vulnerabilities in populations, which are already at risk. Often these groups have already experienced constant discrimination because of their ethnicity, religion, class, or gender, which has left them living in fragile physical environments.¹⁴ Moreover, preexisting civil war or a

¹³ “What Is Vulnerability?” - IFRC. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. Web. <https://www.ifrc.org/en/what-we-do/disaster-management/about-disasters/what-is-a-disaster/what-is-vulnerability/>.

¹⁴ Fletcher, Laurel E., Eric Stover, and Harvey M. Weinstein, eds. *After the Tsunami: Human Rights of Vulnerable Populations*. Berkeley: Human Rights Center, University of California, Berkeley, 2005. Print.

history of ongoing human rights abuses can complicate or interfere with aid relief and reconstruction.¹⁵

Women and Gender-specific Vulnerabilities

Social and economic complications, such as displacement, public health issues (e.g., contaminated water, epidemics, malnourishment), and poverty are related to natural disasters. The impact could often be mitigated if local governments had complied with not only international treaties but also national laws by previously developed programs and measures to protect vulnerable groups to preserve the quality of life of citizens. Historical data suggests that natural disasters radically increase poor living conditions of vulnerable groups who often found challenges and difficulties to have their human rights respected. According to Max Dilley in his book *Natural Disaster Hotspots: A Global Risk Analysis*, the most vulnerable populations tend to be the most marginalized, due to a lack of access to information, lack of security, and irregular food supply, which, in lesser-developed countries, tend to be women and children.¹⁶ Consequently, they become more vulnerable, and their afflictions are more severe during and after the disaster.

Even though information about particular cases is scarce, studies, polls, and post-disaster evaluations indicate that women and girls are more likely to die after a natural disaster not

¹⁵ Fletcher, Laurel E., Eric Stover, and Harvey M. Weinstein, eds. *After the Tsunami: Human Rights of Vulnerable Populations*. Berkeley: Human Rights Center, University of California, Berkeley, 2005.

¹⁶ Dilley, Max. *Natural Disaster Hotspots: A Global Risk Analysis*. World Bank. 2005

because of biological reasons but because of gender norms that commonly forbid women's access to aid, food, and information.¹⁷ Women face a double disaster since they are prone to experience not only material loss but also intangible damages. Unlike men, who are often prioritized in hospital and food distribution, girls and women do not receive immediate medical attention. They are forced to leave their homes, and they are often relegated to the margins when aid is distributed. Their health and well-being is further compromised as they are more vulnerable to suffer from sexual violence, trauma, increased workload, and exclusion from education, and girls are frequently pressured to marry older men.¹⁸ Therefore, women who are primary caregivers with greater responsibility for household work will have less time and capacity to mobilize resources for recovery and consequently will become fatal victims of this kind of emergency.¹⁹

Miloon Kothari, the special rapporteur on adequate housing of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, stated in a 2005 report that “immediately after the tsunami, aid was often distributed in places and ways that were more accessible to men. It was a struggle for women to be recognized as heads of households and receive their dues. Only in a very few cases was special attention given to the needs of single women, including widows. In all countries, compensation was almost always handed out to male members of the family who did not necessarily share it with the women.”²⁰ Kothari also stated “relief and rehabilitation efforts are

¹⁷ Araujo, Ariana, and Andrea Quesada-Aguilar. *Gender Equality and Adaptation, Women's Environment and Development Organization*. 2013. pp. 3.

¹⁸ Bradshaw, Sarah, and Maureen Fordham. *Women, Girls and Disaster*. Department for International Development, United Kingdom.

¹⁹ Fitzpatrick, Daniel. *Women's Rights to Land and Housing in Tsunami-affected Aceh, Indonesia*. Asia Research Institute, Singapore, pp. 9.

²⁰ Kothari, Miloon, Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing, UN Commission of Human Rights, *Tsunami Response: A Human Rights Assessment*. New Delhi, 2006. pp. 43

dominated by male interests and fail to recognize the crucial role of women in leading the recovery process.”²¹

Consequently, international humanitarian actors need to address gender-specific concerns of single women, including widows and teenage girls. International organizations’ interests must include but must not be limited to: poor access to health services, displacement, violence, and poverty. Many of the affected women have not been able to create a household and had not been compensated after the death of their partners, which creates unequal housing opportunities forcing women to live in shelters that affect their privacy and security. “Women are being routinely excluded from decision making. Government policies have failed to offer new opportunities for women.”²²

Similarly, the Human Rights Center of the University of California, Berkeley, states that “women and children, especially if they are widowed or orphaned, are at risk of exploitation due to higher rates of morbidity and mortality and continued displacement without the safety net of family and community to protect them. Moreover, aid often undermines self-sufficiency and perpetuates dependency on relief.”²³ Many studies were made after the tsunami of 2004, but none of them found any confirmed cases of human trafficking of survivors. Although it was known that many girls between the ages of 12 and 15 were wed to older men and obligated to establish new households outside their villages.²⁴

²¹ Id. pp.12

²² Id. pp. 60

²³ “After the Tsunami: Human Rights of Vulnerable Populations.” Berkeley: Human Rights Center, University of California, Berkeley, 2005. 01 October 2005. Web.

²⁴ Surveys made in Indonesia by the Harvard Center for Population and Development Studies broke their results down to older children 15 to 17 and those 9 to 14. Among the older group,

Many of the surveys made in the affected area during the following year of the disaster confirmed that there was an increased pressure on girls to marry early and a rising trend of underage marriage.²⁵ It was also reported that parents who did not have enough money or food to maintain their households often married off young daughters to release the family from some of the pressure of taking care of them. INGOs that worked in the proximity of areas affected by the tsunami also reported many new cases of bigamy, where men have attained more than one wife in the aftermath of the disaster.²⁶

Furthermore, violence against women was noticeable in the aftermath of the disaster and soon after the tsunami struck. Miloon Kothari and his investigative team included in their special report that women were being pulled out of the water while they were bathing and were violently raped by local men. The report states “vulnerability to sexual violence increases manifold under camp conditions where toilet facilities and living quarters are forced out into the public domain.”²⁷ Testimonies from women reported that they were often solicited for sexual favors when they appeared to be alone.

Additionally, the IFRC explains that in a disaster, women are generally affected “differently from men because of their social status, family responsibilities, or reproductive

Elizabeth Frankenberg, a professor of Public Policy and Sociology at Duke University followed up the results saying that the teens appeared to fill the roles of missing parents, with boys dropping out of school to work, and girls less likely to be at school or work, but taking on more household chores and more likely to be married. Indonesian girls were more likely to marry older men, as men who lost wives in the disaster quickly remarried. The result was that the average age gap between men and their wives in the area rose from about 6 years to 13 years.

²⁵ Tsunami Response, A Human Rights Assessment, United Nations. 2005.

²⁶ Kothari, Miloon, Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing, UN Commission of Human Rights, Tsunami Response: A Human Rights Assessment, New Delhi, 2006. p. 46.

²⁷ Id. pp. 46.

role.”²⁸ Furthermore, statistics show that women, boys, and girls are 14 times more likely than men to die during a disaster.²⁹

Women also confront unique challenges when facing disasters. Despite literature that suggests women are more likely to recognize and respond to risk, women tend to be poorer relative to men and may not have the necessary resources to respond to and recover from disasters.³⁰ This problem is particularly evident among single mothers, whose poverty rates exceed that of single or married women and who must not only protect themselves but must also safeguard the lives of their children when threats emerge. During the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, women and children were more likely to suffer injuries and fatalities than men and boys were. Women’s vulnerability to disasters is also shaped by traditional gender roles, power and privilege, low wages, and secondary responsibilities such as childcare.³¹

Women and girls are also prone to experience more intangible losses (e.g., loss of health, mental illness). Women are subject to a number of indirect impacts that arise from the event, including violence and trauma, pressure to marry early, loss or reduction in education

²⁸ “What Is Vulnerability?” - IFRC. The International Federation of Red Cross. Web.

²⁹ Professors from The London’s School of Economics and Political Science Eric Neumayer and Thomas Plümper analyzed disasters in 141 countries and found that, when it came to deaths, gender differences were directly linked to women’s economic and social rights; in societies where women and men enjoyed equal rights, disasters caused the same number of deaths in both sexes. They also confirmed that discrepancies were the result of existing inequalities. For example, boys were given preferential treatment during rescue efforts and, following disasters, both women and girls suffered more from shortages of food and economic resources.

³⁰ During the emergency caused by Hurricane Katrina in the United States, most of the victims trapped in New Orleans were Afro-American women with their children, the poorest demographic group in that part of the country.

³¹ Elaine Enarson and Betty H. Morrow, “Why Gender? Why Women? An Introduction to Women and Disaster,” in *The Gendered Terrain of Disaster: Through Women’s Eyes*, ed. Elaine Enarson and Betty H. Morrow (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998).

opportunities, and an increase in their workload. Thus, they may suffer a “double disaster” and these more intangible impacts may be the real “disaster” for women and girls.³²

Human Rights Law Approach

Between 1949 and 1959, the UN Commission of Human Rights developed as many as four human rights instruments in order to protect women from discrimination and other human rights violations.³³ Even though these treaties were created to protect women in vulnerable areas such as work equality, marriage, and social inclusion, the international community believed that women’s rights were best protected and promoted by general human rights treaties.³⁴ Furthermore, in order to put a halt to various kinds of gender discrimination during the last few decades and to support the appearance of many pro-women advocacy organizations, the United Nations adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) on December 18, 1979. This convention stated that the term *discrimination against women* will represent “any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any

³² Bradshaw, Sarah, and Maureen Fordham. *Women, Girls and Disaster: A Review for DFID*. 2013.

³³ The Convention on the Political Rights of Women, adopted by the General Assembly on 20 December 1952, the Convention on the Nationality of Married Women, adopted by the Assembly on 29 January 1957, the Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages adopted on 7 November 1962, and the Recommendation on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages adopted on 1 November 1965.

³⁴ “Short History of CEDAW Convention.” Report by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

other field (article I).”³⁵ However, none of these treaties considered the issue of discrimination or violation of human rights during a natural disaster.

The United Nations Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) was established in June 1992 in response to the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 46/182 on the consolidation of humanitarian assistance. In 2006, The IASC adopted the Operational Guidelines on Human Rights and Natural Disasters in response to the humanitarian crises after the earthquake and tsunami in Indonesia in 2004 and Hurricane Katrina in the United States in 2005. According to these guidelines and for the purposes of this research, the term *natural disaster* is used and “the magnitude of the consequences of sudden natural hazards is a direct result of the way individuals and societies relate to threats originating from natural hazards.”³⁶

One year prior to publishing the Operational Guidelines, the IASC presented the Guidelines for the Use of the Self-Assessment Tool (IASC Task Force on Natural Disaster). These guidelines were meant to acknowledge the most important requirements from a country in order to be prepared in case of a natural disaster and included the inventory of national capacities, hazard identification, vulnerability assessment, and contingency planning. Furthermore, the tools were based in terms of economic solvency and emergency preparedness and excluded topics such as liability of humanitarian aid or vulnerable populations, and it (i.e. IASC Toolkit) takes a general approach in order to acknowledge the possibility of disasters and incentivizes the creation of disaster management teams:

³⁵ UN General Assembly. “Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.” *United Nations Treaty Series* 1249, p.13. 18 December 1979.

³⁶ IASC Operational Guidelines on Human Rights and Natural Disasters, November 2006. Introduction. p. 8.

In recognition of the growing impact of disasters, both large-scale as well as those that do not make the headlines but that have a significant impact on the lives and livelihoods of developing countries, the IASC partners have compiled a tool for in-country partners world-wide to assess their level of preparedness, identify priority areas to address with regular or specific programmes and/or to establish a Disaster Management Team (or a similar IASC-partnership wide body).

The purpose of the tool is to encourage IASC in-country teams to embark in a process to gradually increase their capacities to respond to the challenge of providing host governments with prompt, effective and concerted country-level support in disaster preparedness and response. This includes an inward view of response preparedness capacities of IASC partners, as well as those of the host government, in order to ascertain priorities and establish preparedness and response mechanisms and systems according to the national legislation, institutional framework and practices.³⁷

The IASC tool kit was established in order to assess the situation of countries at risk in terms of awareness, hazard identification, contingency planning, and logistics. Moreover, the only argument regarding vulnerability looked forward to determine “what and who is at risk.”³⁸ Furthermore, the guidelines targeted the risk of nature and disregarded affected population in the event of a disaster, and specially, they did not specify gender. For this matter, the Operational Guidelines of the IASC were pivotal to the recognition that vulnerable populations such as women, children, or disabled could be victims of human rights violations during and after a natural disaster.³⁹

The first article of the guidelines expresses the concern for vulnerable populations. In the first instance, the guidelines provide a standard right to equality and nondiscrimination clause:

I.1 Persons affected by natural disasters (affected persons) should be recognized and treated as persons entitled to enjoy the same rights and freedoms under

³⁷ IASC Task Force on Natural Disasters: Guidelines for the Use of the Self-Assessment Tool, 2005. pp. 1.

³⁸ Id. pp. 1.

³⁹ Id. pp. 2.

international human rights law as others in their country, and to not be discriminated against on the basis of their race, color, sex, disability, language, religion, political and other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, age or other status.

Thereafter, the guidelines state the need for specific responses to specific groups, including the elderly and children.

Targeted measures to address specific assistance and protection needs of women and children and particular categories of affected populations, including but not limited to older persons, persons with disabilities, persons living with HIV/AIDS, single heads of households and child-headed households, internally displaced persons or members of ethnic or religious communities and indigenous peoples, do not constitute discrimination if, and to the extent that, they are based on differing needs.⁴⁰

Although the new guidelines (2006) are inclusive of women, children, and people with disabilities, some data suggest that in the aftermath of a natural disaster, international responders and local authorities did not implement targeted measures to address specific assistance and protection.⁴¹ Furthermore, the IASC Operational Guidelines on Human Rights and Natural Disasters states that nations are directly responsible for respecting, protecting and fulfilling the human rights of their citizens and other persons on their territory or under their jurisdiction. Moreover, international humanitarian organizations like the Red Cross and Doctors Without Borders, while not directly bound by international human rights treaties, accept that human rights

⁴⁰ IASC Operational Guidelines on Human Rights and Natural Disasters, November 2006. Introduction. pp. 11

⁴¹ A five-country study done by international charities ActionAid, People's Movement for Human Rights Learning, and the HIC-Housing and Land Rights Network revealed how, after the December 2004 tsunami in Indonesia, governments frequently ignored human rights principles and failed to protect survivors from discrimination, land grabbing, and violence.

strengthen all of their actions.⁴² Therefore, they should do their maximum effort to ensure that these rights are not endangered.

Research, Methodology, and Objective

The research will focus on identifying economic, political, sociocultural and legal reasons that influence the states' response to disaster and respect for obligations under the CEDAW, the Operational Guidelines on Human Rights and Natural Disasters, and local regulations. Furthermore, the study will approach the importance of acknowledging gender mainstreaming is the public policy concept of assessing the different implications for women and men of any planned policy action, including legislation and programs, in all areas and levels.⁴³ Finally, the study will present recommendations for immediate actions to states, international organizations, and global humanitarian actors to encourage equality to create a safe environment for girls and women in the process of recovery after major natural disasters.

In the second chapter, the research will present the national and international legal framework that is currently available to protect vulnerable populations, specifically girls and women in the context of discrimination such as CEDAW and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Furthermore, the research will apply a feminist critique to the legal framework in the context of natural disaster. The research will examine the IASC's Operational Guidelines and

⁴² IASC *Operational Guidelines on Human Rights and Natural Disasters*, November 2006. pp. 9.

⁴³ Booth, Christine, and Cinnamon Bennett. "Gender Mainstreaming in the European Union." *European Journal of Women's Studies* 9.4 (2002): 430–46.

the Self-Assessment Tool (IASC Task Force on Natural Disaster) to protect vulnerable populations.

Later, the third chapter will describe the ways in which a natural disaster exposes vulnerability, and therefore, the repercussions for affected population during a natural disaster. Here, the research will state the main social and economic difficulties that an affected area will endure in the aftermath of a natural disaster, specifically, to vulnerable population such as women.

The fourth chapter will argue that international responders contribute and sometimes reproduce existing social-cultural prejudices against women. This chapter will expose how local and international responders are biased by cultural beliefs and patriarchal legal structures, which threaten women's health, economy, and recovery process. This goes beyond the necessary study of longstanding gender inequalities in affected communities, as scholars rarely examine the gender biases within responders' institutions. Furthermore, it will compare the situation in three different countries and scenarios to find similarities that could lead the research to find why human rights are being infringed. The case studies will comprise the 2004 earthquake and tsunami in the Indian Ocean, the 2005 Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, and the 2010 earthquake in Haiti.

Finally, the fifth chapter will present some possible actions that could help female recovery after a major natural disaster. These recommendations will be directed to international organization to ensure that women are treated equally in the aftermath of a disaster, and that this vulnerable population could initiate a reliable and continuous recovery process.

Chapter II

International Law Brief History of the Mechanisms to Protect Women's Rights

The second chapter of the research will present an overview of the available legislation that have been created to protect women's human rights. Moreover, this approach will discuss particular treaties and international agreements that enforce equal treatment in case of natural disaster such as the CEDAW and the IASC Operational Guidelines on the Protection of Persons in Situations of Natural Disasters.

Human Rights Law in Peace and in Emergency

Since the beginning of human history, there have been ideas about morality, freedom, and respect. Although the international law framework was not established until the middle of the 20th century, history indicates that some particular conceptions regarding the well-being of men and women were always present. In his book *Universal Human Rights in Theory and Practice*, Jack Donnelly states that societies had often created elaborated systems in order to fulfill the sense of justice, and therefore, "Conceptions of justice, political legitimacy, and human flourishing that sought to realize human dignity, flourishing, or well-being entirely independent

of human rights. These institutions and practices are alternative to, rather than different formulations of, human rights.”⁴⁴

The initial concept of human rights is credited to the philosophy of natural rights and as a result of natural law. Natural law was conceived as a theory in which a human being enters society with certain basic rights, and they are not to be taken away or denied.⁴⁵ It is well documented that during the colonization of the Americas, when Spanish clerics were examining the extension of such rights to indigenous people, the idea of universal rights was presented in the Valladolid debate.⁴⁶ Bishop of Chiapas and Dominican friar Bartolomé de las Casas argued in favor of equal rights to indigenous people and freedom from slavery for all humans regardless of race or religion.⁴⁷

Later, during the 17th century, English philosopher John Locke argued about natural rights and was able to identify them as “life, liberty, and estate (property),” and stated that these essential rights could not be denied or surrendered in any social convention. Furthermore, during the next century, two important uprisings occurred: In 1776, the United States adopted the

⁴⁴ Donnelly, Jack. *Universal Human Rights in Theory and Practice*. 2nd ed. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003.

⁴⁵ According to *The Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia*, natural law comes with a theological background in which the beliefs that people, as creatures of nature and God, should live their lives and organize their society on the basis of rules and precepts laid down by nature or God. Later on, pursuing the idea of individualism, natural law doctrines were adapted in order to establish that individuals, because they are natural beings, have rights that cannot be violated by anyone or by any society.

⁴⁶ The Valladolid debate (1550–1551) concerned the treatment of natives of the New World. It was held in the Spanish city of Valladolid and consisted of two opposing views about the colonization of the Americas. Bartolomé de las Casas argued that the Amerindians were free men in the natural order and deserved the same treatment as others, according to Catholic theology.

⁴⁷ Hannum, Hurst. *The Concept of Human Rights. International Human Rights: Problems of Law, Policy, and Practice*. Aspen Publishers, 2006. 31–33.

Declaration of Independence, and in 1789, France adopted the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen. Both declarations recognized basic universal rights, such as freedom and equality, and were focused on needs and interests of elite men:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.⁴⁸

The most egregious abuses of the 19th century were characterized by slavery and poor working conditions. Regardless of the abolition acts signed by the British Empire in 1807 and 1833, many states continued exploiting men and women. After the Civil War (1861–1865), many amendments were made to the United States Constitution, which granted the end of slavery, the right to vote to African American people, and full citizenship for the ones born in the United States. Moreover, labor unions helped establish minimum work conditions and the right to strike. And finally, women’s rights movements began to take shape and demanded for their right to vote.

In 1864, the International Committee of the Red Cross⁴⁹ recognized that it is “primarily the duty and responsibility of a nation to safeguard the health and physical well-being of its own people”, particularly during times of war, that there will be a “need for voluntary agencies to supplement . . . the official agencies charged with these responsibilities in every country.”⁵⁰ To

⁴⁸ United States Declaration of Independence, 1776

⁴⁹ Between the Civil War, the Battle of Waterloo, and the Conflict of Crimea, more than 750,000 lives were lost, and thousands were wounded, including military, health providers, women, and children. In 1863, Henri Dunant, a Swiss businessman and social activist, arranged an unofficial international conference at which it was agreed that each country should form a relief organization capable of assisting the army medical services in wartime. Thus, the Red Cross was created.

⁵⁰ Anderson, Chandler P. “The International Red Cross Organization.” *The American Journal of International Law* (1920): 210.

ensure that this statement wouldn't be overseen, it was required to create a body of rules to govern those states involved in armed conflicts.

The first Geneva Convention was held in Geneva, Switzerland, on August 22, 1864, and the Geneva Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded and Sick in Armed Forces in the Field was signed by 12 of the more powerful European states such as the Kingdoms of Prussia and Württemberg, the Grand Duchies of Baden and Hesse, and the Kingdom of Spain.

The principles discussed in the convention asked for wounded soldiers to be humanely treated, not to be killed, injured, tortured, or subjected to biological experimentation. Also, it presented an initial overview of neutrality stating that regardless of a soldier's nationality, he was allowed to be transferred and be cared for. Furthermore, the convention gives a basic authorization to neutral humanitarian organizations to provide protection and relief for wounded and sick soldiers as well as medical and religious personnel.⁵¹ Consequently, the first Geneva Convention developed the foundations of international humanitarian law.⁵² International humanitarian law requires that the human rights of combatants and civilians are never suspended, even in states of conflict or emergency. This requirement is highly relevant to the central claim of this thesis that humanitarian responders must not ignore women's heightened vulnerability to human rights abuse in disaster.

⁵¹ Pictet, Jean S. "The New Geneva Conventions for the Protection of War Victims." *The American Journal of International Law* (1951): 462–475.

⁵² The First Geneva Convention, for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded in Armies in the Field, is one of four treaties of the Geneva Conventions. It defines "the basis on which rest the rules of international law for the protection of the victims of armed conflicts." It was first adopted in 1864, but was significantly updated in 1906, 1929, and 1949.

After World War I and II, some human rights instruments were developed. For example, the League of Nations was established in 1919 to prevent war, endorse peace, and promote disarmament, negotiation, and diplomacy.⁵³ By 1939, at least 63 countries became part of the League of Nations. Later, the covenant forming the League of Nations was included in the Treaty of Versailles, which was signed to end WWI, and it came into force in January 10, 1920. In 1945, during the Yalta Conference, the member states created a new body to replace the initial role of the League of Nations, which was later meant to be the foundation of the United Nations.⁵⁴

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) is the most important treaty regarding human rights since it set the canvas for the creation of more specific bodies of law. The UDHR was adopted by the General Assembly of the UN on December 10, 1948, in France. It consists of 30 articles, which “reaffirmed faith in fundamental human rights, and dignity and worth of the human person”⁵⁵ and asked the members to promote and encourage respect for human rights regardless of any distinction, including race, sex, nationality, or social class.

The International Bill of Human Rights comprises the UDHR, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and its two optional protocols.⁵⁶ Furthermore, in 1966, the General Assembly of the UN adopted the two detailed covenants. To complete the International Bill of Human Rights, in

⁵³ Duggan, Stephen Pierce. *The League of Nations, the Principle and the Practice*. Mallock Press, 2008.

⁵⁴ Weiss, Thomas G. *United Nations and Changing World Politics*. ReadHowYouWant.com, 2011.

⁵⁵ Preamble, The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, United Nations, 1948.

⁵⁶ Williams, Paul, United Nations General Assembly. *The International Bill of Human Rights*. Entwistle Books, 1981.

1976, once a satisfactory number of nations ratified both covenants, the bill took on the force of international law.⁵⁷

Women's Human Rights

The CEDAW was adopted in 1979 by the General Assembly of the UN, and its purpose is to present an International Bill of Rights exclusively for women since previous conventions were androcentric. The CEDAW includes 30 articles which define discrimination against women: "Any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field."⁵⁸

The convention indicates the duties or responsibilities of every nation to terminate this kind of discrimination and what steps to take in order to create equality between men and women. By accepting the convention, nations commit themselves to comply with a series of actions to end discrimination against women in all forms. According to the United Nations Entity of Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, member states commit to incorporate the principle of equality of men and women in their legal system, abolish all discriminatory laws and adopt appropriate ones, prohibiting discrimination against women; establish tribunals and other public institutions to ensure the effective protection of women against discrimination; and ensure elimination of all acts of discrimination against women by persons, organizations, or enterprises. Moreover, the CEDAW provides a basic legal framework to create an equal environment

⁵⁷ Lauterpacht, Hersch. *International Law and Human Rights*. Shoe String Press Inc., 1950.

⁵⁸ Article 1, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, United Nations. 1979.

between genders. States' parties agree to take all appropriate measures, including legislation and temporary special measures so that women can enjoy all their human rights and fundamental freedoms.⁵⁹

Furthermore, the convention reflects the reproductive rights of women, and it enforces that cultural belief and traditions, which have shaped gender roles and how family relations are constructed, need to comply with this regulation. Moreover, states also agree to take appropriate measures against all forms of traffic in women and any kind of exploitation of girls and women.⁶⁰ Furthermore, the CEDAW affirms women's rights to acquire, change, or retain their nationality and the nationality of their children.⁶¹ The countries that have ratified or acceded to the CEDAW are legally bound and are required to put their maximum effort in order to put these articles into practice.

IASC Operational Guidelines on the Protection of Persons in Situations of Natural Disasters

Although the CEDAW was created to acknowledge gender and vulnerability, there was a gap in national and international legislation that ignored how human rights were being affected when a natural disaster occurred. The United Nations was unaware of how people, authorities, and humanitarian aid workers were acting while helping people recover from disaster since their primary concern were victims of armed conflict.⁶² After 2001, the increasing concern about

⁵⁹ Overview of the Convention, United Nations Entity of Gender Equality and the Empowerment to Women,

⁶⁰ CEDAW, Article 6.

⁶¹ Id. Article 9.

⁶² Watkin, Kenneth. "Controlling the Use of Force: A Role for Human Rights Norms in Contemporary Armed Conflict." *American Journal of International Law* (2004): 1–34.

terrorism made international organizations and humanitarian actors expand their efforts to help those who were stranded in countries with armed conflicts in the Middle East.⁶³ Therefore, it was not until 2004 that the earthquake and tsunami that struck Indonesia and more than 10 countries along its way became a wakeup call that human rights of affected communities had to be mainstreamed into local and international responses to disaster relief.

In 2005, the IASC prepared the In-Country Team Self-Assessment Tool for Natural Disaster Response Preparedness that created a checklist in order to recognize the level of preparedness of a country in terms of a natural disaster.⁶⁴ While vague, it also stated that authorities, caregivers, and international responders should work together to help people in distress and begin a recovery process, according to their means, and help rebuild the affected areas as soon as possible. This tool did not make any reference to human or civil rights, equality or non-discrimination.

One year after the creation of the Assessment Tool for Natural Disaster Response Preparedness, the IASC created the Operational Guidelines, which were addressed to intergovernmental and nongovernmental humanitarian actors when they were called upon to become active just before or in the aftermath of a natural disaster.⁶⁵ These Operational Guidelines did not talk about the inherent human rights of the affected population, rather they take an international law approach in which humanitarian actors must enforce the human rights

⁶³ Dennis, Michael J. “Application of Human Rights Treaties Extraterritorially in Times of Armed Conflict and Military Occupation.” *American Journal of International Law* (2005): 119–141.

⁶⁴ IASC Task Force on Natural Disasters: Guidelines for the Use of the Self-Assessment Tool, 2005

⁶⁵ Protecting Persons Affected by a Natural Disaster, IASC Operational Guidelines on Human Rights and Natural Disasters, 2006.

of those in need. Furthermore, these guidelines were created in order to implement a rights-based approach to the humanitarian actors' actions in the context of natural disasters. Although these guidelines have been written taking into account the possible consequences and socioeconomic implications of natural disasters, most of them are also relevant in preparation for or after other kinds of disasters (e.g., armed conflicts, oil spills, and nuclear explosion).

The publication of these guidelines reflects an understanding of the need for the humanitarian system to provide to the people on the front lines of disaster response the guidance they need to ensure the protection of the rights of the people left homeless by natural disasters.⁶⁶

After major disasters such as earthquakes, tsunamis, and hurricanes affected large areas in Asia and America during 2004/2005, it was clear that thousands were in need of aid and comfort. Therefore, these guidelines helped acknowledge that often the victim's human rights are not sufficiently taken into account.⁶⁷

In conclusion, human rights are steadily evolving. Since the first thoughts regarding natural law to the importance of recognizing gender and vulnerabilities, this chapter has established a preface of how men and women are not treated equally. Even though there are instruments to avoid discrimination, the reality of vulnerable populations is not a perfect portrait. Therefore, the next chapter will assess the vulnerability of women during a natural disaster and how they are coping with the effects of catastrophes while fighting for a nondiscriminatory process of recovery.

⁶⁶ Protecting Persons Affected by a Natural Disaster, IASC Operational Guidelines on Human Rights and Natural Disasters, 2006.

⁶⁷ Id. p. 17.

Chapter III

The Gender of a Natural Disaster

To understand the importance of a gendered approach to the humanitarian response after a natural disaster, it is necessary to understand how patriarchal societies, cultural beliefs, and poverty rates are threatening women's process of recovery. Therefore, this chapter will focus on the integration of vulnerability after a natural disaster and will expose three cases in which a biased society has endangered women: the 2004 earthquake and tsunami in the Indian Ocean, the 2005 Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, and the 2010 earthquake in Haiti.

Vulnerability in Times of Disaster

Ben Wisner et al. describe gender as vulnerability as follows:

Gender is pervasive division affecting all societies, and it channels access to social and economic resources away from women and towards men. Women are often denied the vote, the right to inherit land, and generally have less control over income-earning opportunities and cash within their own households. Normally their access to resources is inferior to that of men. Since our argument is that less access to resources, in the absence of other compensations to provide safe conditions, leads to increased vulnerability, we contend that in general women are more vulnerable to hazards.⁶⁸

Notwithstanding, it is acknowledged that men and women play different roles in society and therefore have different needs and interests. For instance, while women are responsible for getting reproductive healthcare and taking care of children, men are responsible for providing an

⁶⁸ Blaikie, Piers M. *At Risk: Natural Hazards, People's Vulnerability, and Disasters*. London: Routledge, 1994. Print.

income for the household. This segregated accessibility to resources can lead to an uneven distribution of income, aid, and labor opportunities. These issues are crucial when it comes to the inclusion of gender into policies for disaster risk management, which allows the visualization and interpretation of how these differences affect the construction of vulnerabilities and different capacities according to gender. From a gender perspective, this approach involves identifying and estimating resilience and empowerment of women and men in every historical and social context to reduce vulnerabilities and strengthen abilities, skills, aptitudes, attitudes, and knowledge necessary to reduce risks and impacts of disasters.

Furthermore, research shows that “women’s heightened exposure results from their social class, their caregiving roles and their relative lack of power and status.”⁶⁹ Also, studies find that woman-headed households are more likely to be vulnerable to poverty, and the risk increases if these women are members of ethnic or racial minorities.⁷⁰ Moreover, feelings of massive anxiety, helplessness, and insecurity in the face of overwhelming, life-threatening danger often strengthen the communities’ need to stick to age-old familiar patterns of behavior and reject tolerance for difference and conflict. Under such circumstances, gender-based prejudices, patriarchal values, and behavior patterns are likely to become stronger. Therefore, it is necessary to evaluate and assess women’s conditions and status in disaster and post-disaster circumstances to understand their condition in society.

⁶⁹ Tobin, Graham, and Linda Whiteford. “The Role of Women in Post-disaster Environments: Health and Community Sustainability.” The Center for Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance. 2001.

⁷⁰ Mileti, Dennis S. *Disasters by Design: A Reassessment of Natural Hazards in the United States*. Washington, D.C.: Joseph Henry, 1999. Print.

Nevertheless, biological differences between men and women have been a clear justification to transform natural division of tasks and responsibilities according to sex. Thus, in most societies, women are expected to assume reproductive tasks, while physical labor is compulsory for men to generate an income. Meanwhile, women's reproductive tasks include not only giving birth but also doing other chores related to food, hygiene, care and education of children, health care of disabled and elderly people, and maintenance of properties.⁷¹ Unlike how men work, women often work without any compensation, and those activities are not socially acknowledged. Although women have increased their participation in the labor market and perform multiple activities for income generation, reproductive and caregiving tasks remain under their responsibility. This situation generates an excessive load of tasks that restricts women's opportunities for personal and professional development.⁷²

In low-income communities, women assume the role of community managers, working voluntarily in tasks related to solving shortages of food, health, education, and general care of children and elderly people. Since these activities are considered as an extension of their domestic role, they perform their duties without any financial compensation. Furthermore, women's political inclusion is almost nonexistent since they are not recognized as public figures. Their "caregiver" status takes away any political leadership from women and diminishes the

⁷¹ Bradshaw, Sarah. "Handbook for estimating the socio-economic and environmental effects of disasters." 2003.

⁷² According Amy Tennery from *Time* magazine, in 2011, 83% of women and 65% of men "spent some time doing household activities such as housework, cooking, lawn care or financial and other household management.

participation of females in political parties and the government. On the contrary, men that undertake community work are regarded as political actors.⁷³

The sexual division of labor, gender stereotypes, and how inherited cultural beliefs are influential factors of the relation of men and women toward a disaster. They may be affected by the same disaster, but the response and later recovery is different, thanks to an unequal society. The fact that most of the activities undertaken by women mainly occur in the home and community environment often leaves them in a situation of increased exposure against, for example, floods or landslides. For males, gender dictates the characterization of heroism since they have the opportunity to be part of activities that could help them survive in case of a disaster. For example, in 2004, after the tsunami that struck Indonesia, more women than men perished after the waves touched land. Since boys and men knew how to swim and they were fishing ashore, women were hit directly.⁷⁴

Many studies show that there is ample reason to be extremely concerned about the conditions and roles of women in the outcome of these circumstances.⁷⁵ The reason behind this concern is mainly because natural disasters create an anxious, insecure, and disrupted environment for the affected population. This environment unsettles normal activities, and therefore, scarcity and limited access to resources make the process of recovery difficult. Weaker, dependent, and subordinate groups often have to bear the worst of the catastrophe. Such

⁷³ Enarson, Elaine, and Betty Hearn Morrow. "Why Gender? Why Women? An Introduction to Women and Disaster." *The Gendered Terrain of Disaster: Through Women's Eyes*. Florida International University, Miami: Laboratory for Social and Behavioral Research, 1998. Print.

⁷⁴ According to the Oxfam Briefing Note, the Tsunami's Impact on Women, many women died because they stayed behind to look for their children and other relatives; men more often than women can swim; men more often than women can climb trees. http://www.preventionweb.net/files/1502_bn050326tsunamiwomen.pdf

⁷⁵ Ivanova, Eugenia. "Gender and Disaster Studies." *Academia.edu*. Web.

groups are likely to suffer more from both the direct consequences of a natural disaster because they are less informed, less prepared and less protected, and also from its indirect impact in public and private life as the disaster is transferred and compounded via economic, social, political, and family relationships.⁷⁶ Thus, this situation is considered a “double suffering” originating from natural as well as social, economic, and cultural forces that define the way vulnerable populations experience events like natural disasters. Women in patriarchal societies, developing economies, and traditional cultural contexts are precisely in this position.

It is essential to highlight the necessity of gender-based analyses while studying the repercussions of a natural disaster, and consequently, they should be centered on women’s human rights perspective to avoid developing positions and strategies that can be counterproductive for women. Furthermore, a profound approach to the CEDAW and its monitoring body, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, will help understand how women’s human rights can be utilized not only to help improve women’s conditions in disaster circumstances but also to contribute to women’s overall empowerment and gender equality via disaster response and environmental management.⁷⁷

According to the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) and International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) in an Expert Group Meeting on “Environmental management and the mitigation of natural disasters: a gender perspective” held in 2001, there are policies and measures put in operation during times of disaster that help the female population cope with this type of situation. However, these policies are often gender-

⁷⁶ Choo, Poh-Sze. *Women in the December 26 Tsunami: How Have They Coped; How Can We Help?* WorldFish Center Newsletter, Malaysia. 2005

⁷⁷ Acar, Feride, and Gamze Ege. “Women’s Human Rights in Disaster Contexts: How Can CEDAW Help?” United Nations. Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW). 2001.

based and disrespectful to women's human rights. Thus, inequality and discrimination is encouraged in those communities. For instance, although literature is evidencing gender-specific needs of women in disaster situations, their representation is often left to men on the assumption that women are "more parochial and less competent, like children, dependent on the better judgment of men."⁷⁸ This kind of asseveration has led to the idea that "many aspects of women's lives are simply ignored or dismissed as unimportant compared with most aspects of men's lives during disaster situations".⁷⁹ It is imperative to identify such specific needs to provide a better lifestyle, health care, and access to food and aid to the female population. These changes could lead to an improvement in the difficult day-by-day living that women are expected to carry on during the aftermath of a disaster because of their role as "caregivers."

Additionally, women's ability to participate in rescue and recovery efforts and in community-based decision-making processes following disasters could enhance their self-esteem and therefore their quality of life. Women's participation in these activities would be expected to contribute to their empowerment, and they could be important for community rebuilding and social change.⁸⁰ Otherwise, the lack of women's participation in the recovery process underlines their subordinated status in their families and communities. Moreover, the United Nations Security Council adopted a resolution (S/RES/1325) on women and peace and security on October 31, 2000. The resolution reaffirms the important role of women in the prevention and

⁷⁸ Fuller, H. 1994. "The Development of Women's Policy for Emergencies and Disasters: Outcomes from the Symposium: Women in Emergencies and Disasters." *Journal of Disaster Management* 4: 4, Summer 93/94 (1994). 24.

⁷⁹Id. p.25

⁸⁰ United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) and International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) in an Expert Group Meeting on "Environmental Management and the Mitigation of Natural Disasters: A Gender Perspective." 2001.

resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peace building, peacekeeping, humanitarian response, and in post-conflict reconstruction and stresses the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security.⁸¹

Feride Acar and Gamze Ege, in their article for the United Nations titled “Women’s Human Rights in Disaster Contexts: How Can CEDAW Help?” explain the importance of giving women the opportunity to take part in the rescue process, to actively participate in rebuilding their communities, and to be acknowledged as a strong component of society:

In many parts of the world, often social and cultural traditions of sex-based seclusion and segregation force women to remain in the private sphere, thereby not only inhibiting their participation in community rebuilding and rehabilitation processes (Bari, 1998) but also preventing aid workers from reaching women. In fact, larger numbers of women are necessary as disaster workers of all kinds to both pinpoint women’s specific needs in disaster contexts and to respond to these needs. This is an even more pressing need for societies with sex-segregated cultures where women’s access and interaction with men are severely curtailed by traditional cultural values and practices. In such cases, the absence of female personnel in rescue and recovery may lead to women being seriously deprived of aid. Thus, incorporating women’s needs into disaster preparedness plans and programs through securing women’s participation at all stages of the design and implementation of these measures is vital.

It is important to apply a gendered approach in many humanitarian aid and development projects after a natural disaster. Therefore, I will present some examples: the earthquake and tsunami in Indonesia (2004), Hurricane Katrina in the United States (2005), and the earthquake in Haiti (2010).

⁸¹ UN Security Council. *Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) [on women and peace and security]*. 31 October 2000, S/RES/1325 (2000).

Earthquake and Tsunami, Indonesia (2004)

On December 26, 2004, one of the most powerful earthquakes struck the Indian Ocean, causing a powerful tsunami, which affected more than 10 countries, killing a quarter of a million and displacing more than 500,000 just in Indonesia.⁸² This is considered as one of the most devastating natural disasters on record. Oxfam reported that in some regions, as high as four times more women were killed than men.⁸³ However, one of the issues that were not widely acknowledged during this time was the impact that this massive disaster had in women and girls. In terms of the impact of the tsunami and how the humanitarian aid was delivered, female population was the most endangered.

In one of the most devastated areas, the Aceh province of northern Sumatra, many factors contributed to the disadvantages women faced after the tsunami. Whether it was local culture, religion, politics, or the tsunami aid response itself, it was evident that women were and still are disproportionately marginalized. Therefore, women were challenged to survive and cope with injuries, material loss, and death in their families. Poh-Sze Choo discussed in her article “Women in the December 26 Tsunami: How Have They Coped; How Can We Help?” that the main reasons why the female population had been the most affected after the tsunami were because of a deep-rooted history in Islam and a strong sense of male-centered beliefs. Society’s patriarchal power and hierarchical social structures have left women out of the picture, and they are often considered in the lower steps of the social construction. Therefore, it is important to

⁸² Lay, Thorne, et al. “The Great Sumatra-Andaman Earthquake of 26 December 2004.” *Science*, 308 (2005): 1127–1133

⁸³ Oxfam is an international confederation of 17 organizations working in approximately 94 countries worldwide to find solutions to poverty and what it considers injustice around the world. See more: www.oxfam.org

acknowledge that because of these philosophies that were exacerbated after the disaster, most of the female population perished during the tsunami, and survivors had to cope with an unequal distribution of aid, endangering their endurance. Prior to the tsunami and throughout the reconstruction phase, women have been marginalized and are often neglected from both social activities and even aid projects.

Since the province of Aceh is officially governed by sharia law,⁸⁴ women's roles are often limited to the domestic sphere because of the embedded patriarchal, male-centered political and cultural system they live in.⁸⁵ This religious governance has a significant impact on the human rights of women, such as the right to movement and the right to work and earn an income. Further, the female survivors' right to own land and property has been jeopardized since the disaster because of incoherent laws that delay women to possess the land of their deceased husbands.⁸⁶ Kristen Schulze argued that these practices, mainly patriarchal and antifeminist, have significantly impacted women's ability to recover from the tsunami. However, her study indicated that a biased approach was taken by many international and local NGOs, which also contributed to the difficult recovery of the female population after the tsunami. Further, aid and recovery programs were still focused on male-centered livelihoods, encouraging the stereotypical female position in society and emphasizing the inequality of the economic roles of women in

⁸⁴ Sharia law is an Islamic legal system that provides an Islamic alternative to secular models of governance. Women in societies governed by sharia have far fewer rights than women in the West. Some of their constants are polygamy, wife beating, no specific minimum age for marriage, lesser inheritances, and male guardianship. See more: <http://www.clarionproject.org/understanding-islamism/womens-rights-under-sharia#>

⁸⁵ Yusuf, Muhammad Yasir. "The Consultative Council of Aceh Ulama: History and Role in the Aceh Society." Aceh Institute, *Aceh*. 2009.

⁸⁶ Fitzpatrick, Daniel. "Women's Rights to Land and Housing in Tsunami-affected Aceh, Indonesia." Working Paper No. 3, Asia Research Institute, Singapore. 2008.

their families, in society, and in their process of recovery.⁸⁷ After the tsunami, regardless of their marital status, women were marginalized while accessing government benefits. Their compensations for the death of family members, including husbands and children, and access to food, clothes, health care, and aid resources were obstructed because of the patriarchal legal system and information barriers.⁸⁸

Even though the whole population of the countries affected by the tsunami was equally disrupted, women had a more difficult time recovering from their loss for many reasons, including neglect from NGOs, lack of women's ability to engage in micro-credit program systems, and the absence of activities for women to get involved with.⁸⁹ After the tsunami, international NGOs put their attention in many development projects targeted to the head of the household who are typically men, neglecting the widowed women. Therefore, women were exploited with the excessive increase of unpaid work, continuing to take on the responsibility of domestic duties including caring for the sick, the elderly, and the children, further limiting their ability to recover.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Nowak, Barbara, and Tanya Caulfield. "Women and Livelihoods in Post-tsunami India and Aceh." Working Paper No. 104, Asia Research Institute, Singapore. 2008.

⁸⁸ UNIFEM. *Women Building Their Future*. UNIFEM East and Southeast Asia Regional Office. Thailand. 2009.

⁸⁹ Nowak, Barbara, and Tanya Caulfield. "Women and Livelihoods in Post-tsunami India and Aceh." Working Paper No. 104, Asia Research Institute, Singapore. 2008.

⁹⁰ Salkeld, Annette. "The Value of Gender Analyses in Humanitarian Livelihoods Programming: A Case Study from Nias Island, Indonesia." *Gender and Development* 16.1 (2008): 117–131.

Hurricane Katrina, Gulf Coast, United States, 2005

Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast with a devastating force on August 29, 2005, affecting a region that included Louisiana and its neighboring state, Mississippi. First assessments showed that more than 1,700 people were killed, and hundreds of thousands were displaced.⁹¹

Generally, women are at greater risk during disasters and their aftermaths because of multiple factors. One of these factors is poverty, and studies have shown that women are more likely to live in poverty than men.⁹² An overview of the catastrophe showed that before the disaster, 54% of the population in New Orleans was female. Sadly, 80% of the people left behind during the storm were women because they had no car to evacuate. The answer relies in the high percentage of women living below the poverty line. In New Orleans, one in four women lived below the poverty line, and single, mother-headed households make up 56% of the families living in poor conditions.⁹³

Further, female poverty affects the outcome of any disaster. It limits the resources that allow more opportunities to escape or survive when the conditions prevent escape. The Institute for Women's Policy Research conducted a study and interviewed residents of the New Orleans public housing at the time of Katrina to gather information regarding their lifestyle.⁹⁴ Results

⁹¹ "Hurricane Katrina." News. *The New York Times*, 25 Sept. 2012. Web.

⁹² Cawthorne, Alexandra. "The Straight Facts on Women in Poverty." *Center for American Progress*, 08 Oct. 2008. Web.

⁹³ Butterbaugh, Laura. "Why Did Hurricane Katrina Hit Women So Hard?" *Off Our Backs* 35.9/10 (2005): 17–19.

⁹⁴ Henrici, Jane, Allison Helmuth, and Jackie Braun. *Women, Disasters, and Hurricane Katrina*. Institute of Women's Policy Research, 2010.

showed that few of the women surveyed had cars, and under normal circumstances, they went around the city by walking or by bus. When the city started to flood after the embankments of the Mississippi River broke, women were stranded around the city, unless they were able to find someone with an undamaged vehicle who would help them leave the area.

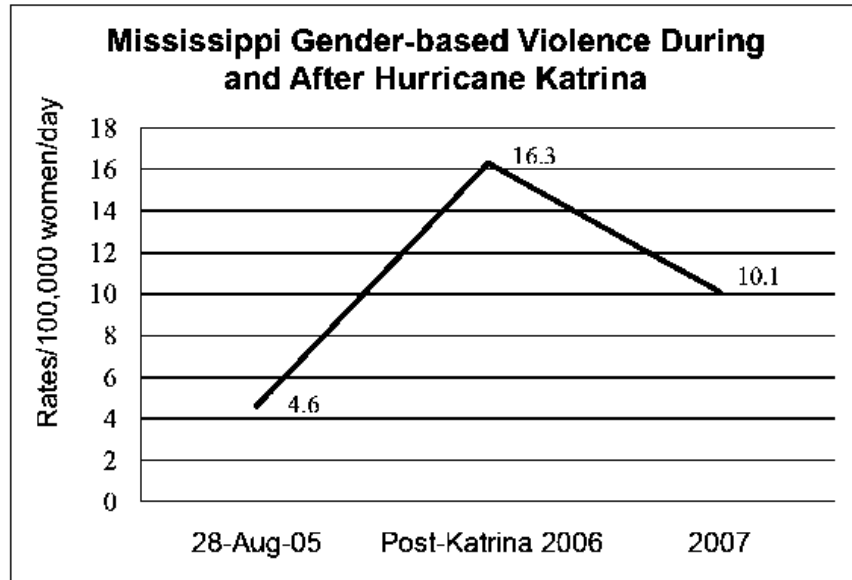
However, poverty was not the only issue against women during Katrina. Women in most regions shared a greater responsibility to care for children and elderly people, and they often worked from home, with residences of less-stable construction than commercial or public buildings. Also, women who were pregnant during the storm or were recovering from childbirth have limited mobility and were stranded in their homes. Equally important, elderly women were among the groups with the highest mortality rate during the disaster because hospitals were not evacuated during the storm.⁹⁵

Additionally, all women faced a high risk of gender-based violence, including physical, mental, and emotional violence. Women were prone to endangerment at the time of the disaster and during the aftermath, including years after the catastrophe had happened. A study by the Institute for Women's Policy Research showed that the rate of gender-based violence (including sexual assault and domestic violence) in Mississippi rose from 4.6 per 100,000 per day when Hurricane Katrina hit the state to 16.3 per 100,000 per day a year later while many women remained displaced from their homes and were living in temporary shelters and trailers.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Neumayer, Eric, and Thomas Plümper. 2007. "The Gendered Nature of Natural Disasters: The Impact of Catastrophic Events on the Gender Gap in Life Expectancy, 1981–2002." *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* 97.3: 551–566.

⁹⁶ Anastario, Michael, Nadine Shehab, and Lynn Lawry. "Increased Gender-based Violence among Women Internally Displaced in Mississippi 2 Years Post-Hurricane Katrina." *Disaster Medicine and Public Health Preparedness* 3 (2009): 18–26.

Therefore, after the hurricane hit, there was palpable evidence that the disaster was gendered and resulted in more female victims and more women assaulted during and soon after the disaster.



Source: IWPR chart using data from Anastario, Michael, Nadine Shehab, and Lynn Lawry. "Increased Gender-based Violence among Women Internally Displaced in Mississippi 2 Years Post-Hurricane Katrina." *Disaster Medicine and Public Health Preparedness* 3 (2009): 18–26.

Gender-sensitive rebuilding efforts would serve both women and men in the aftermath of a disaster. These actions could help the process of recovery of vulnerable populations and would help address the issues that had worsened during the storm such as basic health care, better wages, access to education, and reduction of violence instead of what had been done—suspending the help to the poor, who are mostly women.⁹⁷

⁹⁷ Butterbaugh, Laura. "Why Did Hurricane Katrina Hit Women So Hard?" *Off Our Backs* 35.9/10 (2005), 17–19.

Earthquake Haiti, 2010

On January 12, 2010, a 7.0 magnitude earthquake hit Haiti. A month later, the Haitian government reported that the death toll had reached 230,000 and that the earthquake had caused widespread damage and millions of people had been affected.⁹⁸ In the aftermath of the quake, displacement camps were built by international organizations around the capital of Port-au-Prince. They were often overcrowded and fragile and had almost no privacy. A crisis of gender-based violence and sexual exploitation developed in the subsequent months. But this was not a problem that appeared because of the earthquake. Sexual violence and women's oppression in Haiti predated the disaster. Prior to the earthquake, surveys showed that gender-based and sexual violence was widespread, and women and children had been long aware of the impact of poverty and discrimination in which they were living.⁹⁹

After the quake, conditions worsened and gave way to heightened threats to survivors, especially to girls and women. Insecurity in displacement camps and a historically corrupt criminal justice system contributed to impunity for sexual assaults and violence against women. In a study carried out by the Global Justice Center and Center for Human Rights and Global Justice (CHRGJ) regarding the conditions surrounding four internally displaced people's camps, the researchers had estimated that 14% of the households had at least one member of the household who had been a victim of sexual violence since the earthquake.¹⁰⁰ Those victims were mostly young and female and had minimum access to food, water, and sanitation. Since these

⁹⁸ "Haiti Quake Death Toll Rises to 230,000." BBC News. *BBC*, 11 Feb. 2010. Web.

⁹⁹ "Domestic and Sexual Violence in Haiti: Insufficient Remedies, Inadequate Response." *Focus On Haiti Initiative*, 12 Aug. 2013.

¹⁰⁰ Chen, Michelle. "Two Years after Haiti's Earthquake, Women Are Still Shattered by Sexual Exploitation." *The Nation*, 06 Feb. 2012. Web.

abuses had gone unpunished during the aftermath of the earthquake, women were often assaulted again.

Moreover, statistics showed that more than half of the 1.5 million Haitians that are currently living in temporary shelters are women and young girls.¹⁰¹ But despite being in the majority, they are still the most vulnerable and most easily taken advantage of since they are afraid of being assaulted or killed by their aggressors. Lamerchie Charles-Pierre, general coordinator of OFAVA, a Haitian organization that manages gender-based violence programs in order to protect the rights of Haitian women, said in an interview to the *Epoch Times* that the living conditions in the camps have gotten worse for women: “Women are subject of violence and suffer from mental problems. Typhoid fever and malaria are widely spread. The lack of working opportunities makes things even harder for women to survive.”¹⁰²

Haitian women have been fighting for their rights and have worked alongside the government, and many organizations have been built in the country in order to ameliorate the violent environment in which women live. For instance, KOFAVIV works with 33 organizations around the world to help women contact police and access medical care after they have been sexually abused.¹⁰³ In the eight months following the earthquake, nearly 300 cases of sexual violence and 60 cases of domestic violence were registered by KOFAVIV. Further, Jocie Philistin, project coordinator of KOFAVIV, claimed “women and girls are forced into

¹⁰¹ Krumova, Kremena. “The Plight of Haiti’s Women.” Human Rights. *The Epoch Times*, 16 Sept. 2010. Web.

¹⁰² Id.

¹⁰³ KOFAVIV (*Komisyon Fanm Viktim pou Viktim*) stands for Commission of Women Victims for Victims. It is a nonprofit Haitian women’s organization formed in late 2004 by a group of women from poor neighborhoods in Port-au-Prince who were raped during the 1991–94 military dictatorship and had dedicated their time to fight against gender-based violence. See more: <http://kofaviv.blogspot.com/p/accueil.html>.

prostitution in order to obtain basic necessities like food, etc. They are raped on a regular basis by members of the camps committee, who are in charge of distribution of food supplies in the camps.”¹⁰⁴

The Center for Human Rights and Global Justice stated that the housing crisis in Haiti has worsened significantly after the earthquake of 2010, and it claimed that violence against women has increased as well.¹⁰⁵ A 2011 study showed that there were approximately 50 rapes a day just in Haiti’s capital, Port-au-Prince.¹⁰⁶ Since the earthquake five years ago, hundreds of thousands of Haitians still lived in camps where women have become more vulnerable to violence and abuse.¹⁰⁷

Finally, a study of these three particular cases demonstrates that even though they occurred in three different places, with different cultural beliefs and poverty levels, women are in danger after a natural disaster. The gender lens taken to approach these issues has given me the opportunity to understand how important international treaties and humanitarian actors are to facilitate the process of recovery of the female population. Many factors aggravate the position of women in society, and therefore, significant changes are needed to recognize girls and women as a fundamental part of society. The CEDAW is essential to humanitarian actors. Women must

¹⁰⁴ Krumova, Kremena. “The Plight of Haiti’s Women.” Human Rights. *The Epoch Times*, 16 Sept. 2010. Web.

¹⁰⁵ Chen, Michelle. “Two Years after Haiti’s Earthquake, Women Are Still Shattered by Sexual Exploitation.” *The Nation*, 06 Feb. 2012. Web.

¹⁰⁶ McClelland, Mac. “Aftershocks: Welcome to Haiti’s Reconstruction Hell.” *Mother Jones*, 15 Jan. 2011. Web. 07 Apr. 2015.

¹⁰⁷ The Miami Herald, in its issue of January 11, 2005, stated that five years after the disaster, the number of Haitians living in tents or underneath tarps has dropped from 1.5 million to 79,397. The number of tent cities has been drastically reduced from 1,555 to 105 sites according to the latest figures from the International Organization for Migration. See more: www.miamiherald.com/news/nation-world/world/americas/haiti/article6005817.html#storylink=cpy

be acknowledged in the aftermath of a natural disaster and consequently reinserted in society in order to create a better future for herself and her family.

CHAPTER IV

How International Organizations Can Protect Vulnerable Populations after a Major Disaster

This chapter will discuss some possible actions that could help female recovery after a major natural disaster. These recommendations will be directed to international organizations in order to ensure that women are treated equally in the aftermath of a disaster and that this vulnerable population could initiate a reliable and continuous recovery process.

Recommendations and Possible Actions

In 2011, a year after the earthquake in Haiti, the Women's Ministry, with the support of UN Women, UNICEF, and many human rights advocates, stepped up to coordinate efforts to provide operating guidelines in order to create safer camps and a better environment for women.¹⁰⁸ But this was not enough. The issue of vulnerability had been relegated to a minimum concern since governments, international organizations, and society itself had been dealing with more "important" matters. Women, children, the elderly, and disabled people were not considered equal, and the struggle to create a leveled atmosphere after a natural disaster depended on many factors. Blaikie et al. suggested that gendered vulnerability does not derive from a single factor, such as household headship or poverty, but reflects historically and culturally specific patterns of relations in social institutions, culture, and personal lives,

¹⁰⁸ D'Adesky, Anne-Christine. "Beyond Shock." *Charting the Landscape of Sexual Violence in Post-quake Haiti*. 2012. Web.

intersecting with economic, racial, and other inequalities. Therefore, these conditions create a dangerous environment to women who are at risk when disasters strike.¹⁰⁹

Many studies had been made in the past two decades regarding gender and disaster, but they often offered a contrast of the behavior of men and women in terms of risk perception.¹¹⁰ Elaine Enarson argued that one of the steps to take in order to create a safer environment for women after a catastrophe is to understand that women's vulnerability to disaster is deeply rooted in a gendered global economy. She stated that it is important to document the gendered division of labor not only in a domestic range but also regionally in addition to examining women's regional economic status historically to identify current patterns of employment, wages, and poverty levels.¹¹¹

In the domestic level, in order to assess the particular situation that women endure, recovery initiatives take note of the following aspects of female population: political, economic, and historical dynamics of risk areas; census of women, considering age, marital status, income, family structure, and number of dependents; minorities, including race and disabilities; and patterns of gender-based violence.

Furthermore, patriarchal societies should be studied with a deeper lens since those embedded cultural beliefs often disregard women's necessities. The Pan-American Health Organization stated that "majority of relief efforts are intended for the entire population of a

¹⁰⁹ Enarson, Elaine. "Through Women's Eyes: A Gendered Research Agenda for Disaster Social Science." *Disasters* 22 (1998): 157–173.

¹¹⁰ Bolin, Robert, Martina Jackson, and Allison Crist. "Gender Inequality, Vulnerability, and Disaster: Issues in Theory and Research." *The Gendered Terrain of Disaster: Through Women's Eyes* (1998): 27–44.

¹¹¹ Enarson, Elaine. "Through Women's Eyes: A Gendered Research Agenda for Disaster Social Science." *Disasters* 22 (1998): 157–173.

disaster-affected area; however, when they rely on existing structures of resource distribution that reflects the patriarchal structure of society, women are marginalized in their access to relief resources.” Therefore, girls and women endure clear disadvantages when in need of food relief after a natural disaster.

On an international level, it is imperative to enforce current human rights agreements that focus on the protection and recovery of a female population affected by a natural disaster. The CEDAW Committee should be encouraged to prepare a general recommendation on women and natural disasters to provide a widespread analysis of the relationship between women’s human rights and how they have not been enforced during such circumstances.¹¹² In 2010, the CEDAW Committee noted that the caring roles of women after a natural disaster may incur greater responsibilities; and therefore, they urged all humanitarian relief actors to apply a gender perspective in their work. This framework suggested that humanitarian actors should create innovative food distribution strategies, pay attention to women-headed households, and protect women from sexual violence.¹¹³ The following statement taken from the *Oxfam Handbook of Development and Relief* expresses the importance of a gender-based approach to natural disasters:

Relief efforts to assist “the community” will not assist women and men equally, or address the needs of its weaker or less vocal members, unless they are specifically designed to do so. The appropriateness and effectiveness of this kind of intervention depend crucially on how much is known and understood about existing social structures. Gender relations are a crucial dimension of all socio-economic systems, and the distinct roles and needs of women and of men, as well as of other specific groups of people, should routinely be analyzed. Crucial

¹¹² Acar, Feride, and Gamze Ege. *Women’s Human Rights in Disaster Contexts: How Can CEDAW Help?* United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women, 2001.

¹¹³ Decision 45/III. “Statement of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women on the Situation on Haiti.” UN Doc. A/65/38 (Supp.) 45th session, 2010, para. 4.

questions need to be answered, such as: who cultivates which crops, and when; who markets the crops, and who controls the resources; who cares for which livestock; who decides on changes in cropping or livestock management patterns and on what basis?¹¹⁴

Natural disasters do not give notice to people, but when they do occur, it is necessary to have impartial humanitarian relief that could help prevent cases of gender bias. In this manner, vulnerable groups should be prioritized; and in order to have equal access to aid, embedded cultural beliefs should not govern emergency procedures. Women of all ages and conditions should not be discriminated by age, social status, sexual preference, or physical mobility. Moreover, girls and women who have survived a natural disaster should be offered aid specific to their gender, especially in terms of reproductive and sexual health, privacy, and safety. Further, to empower female survivors, they should be considered in the rescue process and later be an active piece in time of recovery.

On the other hand, relief action should not be considered permanent. Survivors are entitled to rebuild their lives after a catastrophe. Therefore, it is essential for governments and international organizations alike to spend resources and make efforts to create jobs. The opportunity for women to have income will challenge gender discrimination. Integrating gender analysis into the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of post-disaster employment projects are essential to ensure women and men equal opportunities for decent work.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ Eade, Diane, and Suzanne Williams, eds. *Oxfam Handbook of Development and Relief*. 1995. pp. 939.

¹¹⁵ Enarson, Elaine Pitt. *Gender and Natural Disasters*. Geneva: ILO, 2000.

Although human beings are not able to predict the consequences of the next natural disaster, some essential contributions are needed to improve the quality of life of survivors. Hence, considering women as a vulnerable group of society and noting the reality the female population endures during this time, these efforts are indispensable to include women in daily activities and empower them to create a better present and prepare them for a better future.

Conclusions

Natural disasters cannot be predicted, but the political, economic, and social implications of these catastrophes are clear. Vulnerable groups are the most affected, and therefore, their recovery process is longer and more difficult. Women, being part of these vulnerable groups, are prone to suffer gender inequalities in food accessibility, health care, land distribution, and social incursion. Above all, girls and women are in danger of sexual assaults and violence while living in temporary shelters where security and privacy are nonexistent.

A disaster occurs when a significant number of vulnerable people experience a hazard and suffer severe damage and/or disruption of their livelihood system in such way that recovery is unlikely without external aid.¹¹⁶

Although the CEDAW is aware of the disadvantages that women endure in the aftermath of a disaster, international treaties and agreements have not been enforced to affected countries, and humanitarian actors have not been encouraged to perform their rescue and recovery duties in accordance to the convention and to women's human rights. Moreover, many reports from rapporteurs of the United Nations and international organizations have in fact exposed the adversities that women face during a natural disaster. For instance, the three cases exposed in this research emphasize the poor living conditions of female survivors.

Nevertheless, after the earthquake and tsunami in the Indian Ocean on 2004, the Operational Guidelines and Field Manual on Human Rights Protection in Situations of Natural Disaster was created in order to lessen the gap between natural disasters, humanitarian actors,

¹¹⁶ Winchester, P. "Cyclone Mitigation, Resource Allocation and Post-disaster Reconstruction in South India: Lessons from Two Decades of Research." *Disasters* 24 (200): 18–37.

and human rights. Even though these guidelines are not gendered, they offer a first approach to vulnerable groups in which women, children, the elderly, and disabled people take part.

Elaine Enarson, in her work *Gender and Natural Disasters*, argued that disaster recovery is commonly understood as the restoration of “normalcy,” but this restoration does not enable women’s long-term recovery so much as it reconstructs gendered vulnerability to future events. Because of this, it is essential to work in solving those vulnerabilities (e.g., patriarchy, discrimination, violence, and exclusion) and strengthening women’s capacities as community leaders, caregivers, and equal human beings.

Vulnerabilities precede disasters, contribute to their severity, impede effective disaster response and continue afterwards. Needs, on the other hand, arise out of the crisis itself, and are relatively short-term. Most disaster relief efforts have concentrated on meeting immediate needs, rather than on addressing and lessening vulnerabilities.¹¹⁷

In conclusion, several factors exacerbate discrimination and seclusion of female survivors during and after a natural disaster. Poverty, cultural beliefs, or corrupted governments may increase the risk of women to be excluded from humanitarian aid, health care, or better life conditions. The process of recovery for girls and women is often longer and challenging since they cope with lack of food and education and no privacy. More often than not, women endure sexual assaults. Consequently, their mental and reproductive health is compromised. Therefore, international organizations should work along affected governments to ensure that female population is on the right track to recovery.

¹¹⁷ Anderson, Mary B., and Peter J. Woodrow. *Rising from the Ashes: Development Strategies in Times of Disaster*. Boulder: Westview, 1989. Print.

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