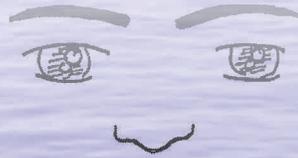




Indian Ocean Tsunami Through The Gender Lens Indian Ocean Tsunami Through The Gender Lens

Insights from Tamil Nadu, India



Chaman Pincha



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New Delhi, 17th September 2008

FOREWORD

India is extremely vulnerable to natural disasters like floods, cyclones, earthquakes, drought and landslides. When the Indian Ocean Tsunami of 26th December 2004 devastated coastal communities in thirteen countries, the people in India also became aware, for the first time, of the vulnerability of coastal villages to the devastating fury of the Tsunami. In spite of the recurring nature of natural disasters which affect several million people every year, the disaster management literature in India has so far dealt mostly with the scientific and technological aspects of these disasters.

Thus, the human face has often been missing in the diagnostics of disasters. Chaman Pincha's study titled "**Indian Ocean Tsunami Through the Gender Lens: Insights from Tamil Nadu, India**" addresses this critical gap in the disaster discourse and centre-stages gender analysis in the context of the post-Tsunami responses of the government, civil society and the disaster-affected communities. One of the most significant insights gathered through painstaking efforts is the need to identify the differential impacts of disasters on the marginalized and vulnerable sections of the society, like Aravanis, Narikuravars, Azhipickers, etc. and the critical imperative to address these through appropriate policy reform initiatives. In this book, some of the best practices of civil society organizations in mainstreaming gender concerns in the post-disaster response phase and the best practices of the Government of Tamil Nadu of introducing several much needed policy reforms to integrate and mainstream the marginalized sections in the overall development process have been documented.



I am confident that this book will be a valuable addition to the disaster management literature in India. It will be a very useful resource to the students of social sciences and humanities, especially to those pursuing their studies in social work, psychology, sociology and gender studies. I am sure that this book will also be welcomed by development practitioners and representatives of Non-Governmental Organizations as it will provide them useful insights on gender-aware disaster management interventions. I hope Chaman Pincha's contribution in this field will encourage academics, practitioners and other stakeholder groups concerned with various aspects of disaster management to explore similar studies.



(N. VINOD CHANDRA MENON)



Preface

Oxfam International is a confederation of thirteen organizations working together with partners and allies around the world in over 100 countries to create lasting solutions to poverty, hunger, and injustice. Effectively responding to disasters and conflicts, worldwide, is one of Oxfam's major areas of focus. When disaster strikes, Oxfam and our partners move quickly to provide life-saving assistance to those in need. Once the immediate danger has passed, we work to rebuild lives and reduce the risk of future disasters. In this endeavor, Oxfam adheres to the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which entitles all people to physical safety, secure livelihoods, basic social services, a life with dignity, and a say in the decisions that affect them.

Oxfam believes that disasters result from the interaction of social vulnerability and natural hazards which combine to put certain groups of people at greater risk than others. This understanding of vulnerability and risk is crucial to our efforts to address the differential impacts of a disaster on men, women, children, the elderly, and the physically challenged. Oxfam believes that disaster response and risk reduction activities—viewed through a vulnerability lens—have the potential to be important catalysts for social change.

Experience has time and again highlighted the particular vulnerability of women and girls in disasters. Oxfam seeks to respond to women's needs after a disaster and, equally important, to engage in work to address the root sources of their vulnerability (social, economic, and political). Oxfam works worldwide to help women campaign for legal reforms, acquire literacy skills, raise the income of their families, strengthen their voice, build peace in their communities, and understand their human rights.

Over the last few decades Oxfam affiliates have conducted a number of research studies aimed at understanding and addressing the gender differentiated impact of disasters. However, every disaster presents new





challenges and opportunities for learning. The magnitude of the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami triggered a massive humanitarian response; thousands of local, national and international organizations rushed to the Tsunami-affected areas to provide assistance. Not all of them had previous experience in disaster response and recovery and many did not have a deep understanding of the gender considerations.

This research builds on an existing body of knowledge on gender and vulnerability to examine how organizations responding to the Tsunami were (or were not) able to incorporate a gender perspective in their efforts to rebuild lives and livelihoods following the disaster. Through a gender perspective, the study has meticulously uncovered and documented the differential impact of the Tsunami on women and men and girls and boys. It has extended the concept of gender to include transgender populations and made visible the inequities borne by them.

The research, through its gender focus, offers insights and perspectives that will leverage the efforts of the humanitarian organizations in addressing gender-based vulnerabilities and needs. The field work in this research is compelling. It demonstrates a thoroughness in its coverage of the varied issues present at grassroots level and penetrates the gender divide. The study brings to the fore many gendered realities that are sure to surprise even the seasoned advocates of the issue. Most importantly the research offers concrete, actionable suggestions and recommendations to humanitarian agencies, to improve gender mainstreaming strategies proactively in their future disaster response and risk reduction work.

We applaud and appreciate the committed work of the author and her team who have shown both a strong grounding in the conceptual framework underpinning the gender mainstreaming issues and the ability to discern the manifestations of gendered imbalances embedded in the field. We hope, the humanitarian agencies involved in disaster relief and risk reduction will find the study a valuable resource for integrating gender equal strategies and approaches.

N Hari Krishna

*India Humanitarian Country Team Representative
Oxfam America*





Acknowledgements

This publication would not have been possible without the intimate revelations and women, men and Aravanis* who readily participated in focus group discussions and in depth interviews and shared their turbulent experiences in settings marked by trust and mutuality. I am deeply grateful for their courage and willingness in recounting their painfully personal feelings and circumstances which can hardly be described in words.

I profoundly value the keen co-operation of the NGOs (Non Government Organizations) who, in spite of their busy work schedules readily spared time for us throughout our research process and were eager to be informed of our research findings. BLESS, AVVAI, CARE Trust, EKTA, FPAI, PEDDA, PURA, SASY, SNEHA, HOPE, and PRAXIS collaborated substantially with the research process.

I thank my team members, Mr. Joseph Regis and Ms. Maheshwari who supported me during the field work. Thanks are due to Ms. B. Mareeswari for taking care of the logistics during our field work. Usha's translation will help take the findings of this research across Tamil Nadu and reach the large Tamil Readership and I thank her for the same.

I thank Dr. Kanchan Mathur and Dr. Shobhita Rajgopalan, Professors, Indian Institution of Development Studies, Jaipur, Rajasthan, for their editorial support. I especially recognize their contributions in refining introductory and concluding chapters.

** A distinctly recognized, at the same time most marginalized and stigmatized persons in India. Some of them are born androgynous, and do not identify themselves with either male/ men or female / women. Contrary to popular perception, they prefer not to describe themselves as men trying to be women, although they like to wear women's clothes. In different areas in India, they are also known as Hijras or Jogappas.*





Many thanks to Ms. Ranjani K Murthy for her advisory feedback to the research process. Her feedback during the review of first draft of the research report helped me sharpening its contents.

Notwithstanding his busy calendar, Professor N. Vinod Chandra Menon, Member, National Disaster Management Authority, Government of India, put in long hours reviewing the draft and providing pointers for further refining and deepening the content through his insights and counsel. Professor Menon has encouraged me all through the process of finalizing this book and its title.

Mr. N. Harikrishna, Humanitarian representative India, Oxfam America, has been a constant source of inspiration and encouragement. He tirelessly went through several versions of the chapters and his critical contributions helped me enrich the contents. The total engagement and intellectual rigor that he brought to bear on the draft versions have significantly added to the depth of this work. In addition, my cheerful thanks to him for creating wonderful cover design for the book.

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I fondly remember the support I received from Ms. Shanthi Devapiriam, Director, Anawim Trust*, for hosting the first phase of the research project.

My grateful thanks to Oxfam America without whose support for this independent study, the publication would not have been possible.

I dearly thank my family, especially my mother-in-law, and my friend Indira Kadambi for their childcaring support, without which I would not have been able to work on this project. I cherish Vishakha, my 12 year old daughter's support by way of enduring my absences even while I was at my home-office, with a cheerfulness that amazed me. Her innocent belief in her mother kept my spirits high.

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I

INTRODUCTION

Worldwide, the incidence of disasters has been increasing dramatically in the recent past. Consequently Disaster management and emergency response have become major concerns for all nations and have acquired a special urgency within the developmental sector over the last two decades.

India is highly vulnerable to natural disasters because of its sub continental characteristics and geography. Some of the major disasters that have occurred in the recent past include the Latur earthquake (1993), Orissa super-cyclone (1999), the Bhuj earthquake (2001), the Tsunami in southern states (2004), and the Kashmir earthquake (2005).

The Indian Ocean Tsunami, also known as Asian Tsunami, caused by the deep-sea earthquake near northern Sumatra, in the early hours of 26 December 2004, is the deadliest in recorded history, killing more than 225,000 people in 11 countries. Following Indonesia and Sri Lanka, India was the third hardest hit country with the Tsunami affecting nearly 2,260 kilometers of India's mainland coast, covering the states of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, and Pondicherry, as well as the islands of Andaman and Nicobar. The Tsunami took away lives, caused severe injuries, destroyed family networks, razed homes and ruined livelihoods. In India the waves killed 12,405 people and injured 6,913. In particular, the disaster affected women and children, who accounted for nearly 75 percent of the fatalities. Nearly





787 women were widowed and 530 children orphaned. The largest human losses were reported in the State of Tamil Nadu and the Union Territory of Andaman and Nicobar Islands (UN/WB/ADB 2005).

In Tamil Nadu, more than 8,000 deaths were reported, a majority of them occurring in the District of Nagapattinam, which recorded 6,065 deaths. Over 3,400 people were reported missing across the State. In all, the Government of Tamil Nadu (GoTN) estimates that 984,564 people were affected by the Tsunami; 126,182 homes were damaged or destroyed, and there was immeasurable loss of property and livelihood (GoTN, 2005).

The loss of lives and livelihood was greatest among those who lived and worked in coastal areas, with the fisheries sector being the worst affected. However, according to the UN Country Team, 2005, the number affected in the non-fishing sectors of coastal economy (including daily wagers) exceeded that in the fishing sector. Boats, nets, kattumarams, (a country boat made of wooden planks, with or without engine) and other fishing crafts including fisher women's vessels and knives, stock of shells, salt, and thatched platforms for drying fish were damaged or destroyed. Coastal agricultural and grazing lands, livestock, raw materials for various home-based occupations, and other enterprises and tools of the trade of electricians, carpenters, and tailors (a majority of whom were women) were also destroyed.

The Tsunami also caused extensive damage to physical infrastructure such as schools, primary health centers, drinking water supply systems, *anganwadis*¹, *balwadis*² harbors/jetties, roads, and bridges. The environmental impact comprised accumulation of debris and rubble, erosion or accretion along the coast, decline in fish catch, sedimentation of lagoons and waterways, and denudation of green cover (TISS, 2005).

Significantly, assessment reports have not been able to adequately calculate the loss in the work sector. Damages to this sector have





long term impacts on micro-enterprises and home-based occupations of women. Loss of work opportunities too is much harder to quantify, even though it has severely affected large groups of vulnerable women and men as well as daily wage earners in both agricultural and non-agricultural sectors (UN Country Team, 2005).

Women, who are more socially, economically and politically vulnerable in most societies, are more severely affected by disasters than men as disasters occur in a universe structured by relations of gender and power cutting across different institutional sites Blaikie et al. (1994). "Gender is a pervasive division affecting all societies, and it channels access to social and economic resources away from women and towards men. Women are often denied 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 hazard" (Enarson and Morrow 1998).

While mechanisms for disaster response, relief, rehabilitation and preparedness may be in place, in the absence of gendered approach well-meaning interventions may fall short of integrating gender concerns in disaster management. Involving women in disaster preparedness, mitigation and response, and understanding gender dynamics within the framework of gender and disaster is therefore critical for developing effective interventions.

Understanding gender, development, and disasters

The issue of women's role in development was placed on the international agenda in the 1970s. The shift in focus from women in development (WID) to gender and development (GAD) emerged in the 1980s. Although WID identified women as a special or separate interest group, GAD identified gender as an integral part of a





development strategy. Within GAD, the situation of women was no longer analyzed independently, but rather in relation to that of men.

It is important to analyze how the concepts of gender and gender relations enhance our understanding of how development processes affect men and women, girls and boys in different ways. Gender refers to socially constructed roles and socially learned behaviors and expectations associated with being a female or male. Men and women are different biologically—but all cultures interpret these innate biological differences which in turn are translated into a set of social expectations about what behaviors and activities are appropriate and what rights, resources, and power they possess. Like race, ethnicity and class, gender is a social category that largely establishes one's life chances, shaping one's participation in the society and in the economy (World Bank, 2001). Gender relations are those socially constituted relations between men and women which are shaped and sanctioned by norms and values held by members of a given society (but not necessarily held with the same degree of conviction). Central to these relations are culturally specific notions of masculinity and femininity, and around these notions appropriate behaviors for each of the genders are socially constructed (Young, 1993).

Kabeer (1994) claims that the use of gender relations as a category of analysis also shifts the focus away from the earlier one on only women. A focus solely on women tended to imply that the problem—and hence the solution—could be confined to women. A focus on social relations, on the other hand, extends the analysis from women and men as isolated categories to the broader interconnecting relationships through which women are positioned as a subordinate group in the division of resources and responsibilities, attributes and capabilities, and power and privilege. Moreover, treating gender as one aspect of social relations reminds us that it is not the only form of inequality in the lives of women and men. As Whitehead (1979)





observed, “While gender is never absent, it is never present in pure form. It is always interwoven with other social inequalities, such as class and race, and has to be analyzed through a holistic framework if the concrete conditions of life for different groups of women and men are to be understood.”

Moser (1989) points out that gender needs can be understood in both practical and strategic terms. Practical gender needs (PGNs) are those that women and men identify in their socially accepted roles in the society. They are practical in nature, often address inadequacies in living conditions (such as availability of water, healthcare, employment), and respond to immediate needs identified within a specific context. Although such needs arise out of gender divisions of labor, meeting them does not change the position of either women or men in the society.

Strategic gender needs (SGNs) are those that are formulated from the socially structured subordinate position of women in the society. Such biases vary according to particular contexts and may include gender-based discrimination in the division of labor in household management, in service, and product markets (including access to and control over productive resources); legal status and rights; and participation in decision making at the household, community, or national level. Meeting such needs through policies to improve women’s status and promote equity entails actions to improve systematic biases against women, thereby changing women’s position in the society (World Bank, 1999).

Since 1995, following the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, numerous development agencies have adopted gender mainstreaming strategies to ensure that gender perspectives are incorporated in all areas, sectors, and levels to promote gender equality. Gender mainstreaming strategies go beyond an exclusive focus on women to look at both women and men as actors and beneficiaries in the process of development, and how their rights are defined in





relation to one another. The concept of “mainstreaming gender,” as it is most commonly applied, refers to efforts that transform the existing development agenda through the application of a gender perspective. Gender mainstreaming therefore attempts to integrate the concerns of women and men in development planning and practice, with the objective of promoting gender equality.

According to the Beijing Platform of Action, gender mainstreaming requires that: “... governments and other actors should promote an active and visible policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective in all policies and programs, so that, before decisions are taken, an analysis is made of the effects on women and men, respectively” (North, 2008).

Linking gender and disasters

The recent increase in attention to the effects of natural disasters has resulted in a plethora of different perspectives on the issue. In particular, several scholars have brought a gender focus to the analysis of disaster mitigation and response. Early works have documented how women’s social inequality, health, and everyday patterns of living contributed to disproportionately high fatalities among girls and women during the 1943 Bengal famine in India and in the Russian earthquakes (1948 and 1966). Throughout the 1990s, disasters in various parts of the world provided ample opportunity for researchers to explore gender themes. The enormous loss of life in disasters, especially among mid life women with family responsibilities, galvanized many South Asian scholars and practitioners to examine gender relations and disaster risk (Enarson and Colorada, 1988).

Over the last two decades in India, both the government agencies and NGOs have attempted to proactively integrate gender concerns in disaster response, planning, and vulnerability discourse. Many NGOs have explicitly addressed women’s position and concerns and the implications of gender relations. This was also evident in the Tsunami disaster.





It is now widely recognized that disasters and related risks and vulnerabilities have social as well as physical dimensions. The impact of disasters depends on the nature and intensity of the event, but in all cases the impact varies according to the degree of vulnerability of the social groups that constitute the affected population. Disasters impact men and women differently, as the roles and responsibilities assigned to women and men by society are varied. Women have natural/biological roles, i.e., pregnancy, lactation, and the reproductive cycle. In addition, they are responsible for the care of children, the elderly, and the disabled, which adds to their vulnerability. Enarson and Morrow (1998) illustrate that women's paid and unpaid care giving responsibilities place them in a position to emotionally and materially sustain kin and community throughout the experiences of disaster and recovery.

Besides, women are less likely to possess self survival skills, such as swimming, climbing, and knowledge of technology, as cultural restrictions define gender roles and responsibilities. In the Cox Bazar cyclone in Bangladesh in 1970, 500,000 people lost their lives, but more women lost their lives because they were not able to swim and save themselves from drowning in the storm surge.

Women's access to resources is considerably more limited than that of men, i.e., social networks and influence, transportation, information, skills (including literacy), control over land and other economic resources, personal mobility, secure housing and employment, freedom from violence, and control over decision-making, all of which contribute to disaster preparedness, mitigation, and rehabilitation. Therefore the restricted access to resources, in the absence of other compensatory conditions of safety, leads to their increased vulnerability to hazards.

Economic, racial/ethnic, and age stratification make some women more vulnerable than others before, during, and after disaster. The vulnerability of single mothers, widows, or elderly women is especially evident, reinforcing the familiar notion of women as economic and





emotional dependents, a typical disaster victim. As a group, women-headed households are economically and politically disadvantaged and have acute needs and reduced resources when disaster strikes their homes; they are nonetheless often excluded from official relief programs that regard men as “head of households” (Enarson and Morrow 1998).

The less economic, political and cultural power women enjoy before an event, the greater their suffering in the aftermath. Low-income women whose earnings are essential for family survival may die in floods when they “choose to” remain in their homes to protect precious livestock or goods. Cultural practices such as *purdah* ((Veil for preventing women from being seeing by men) put some women at special risk in some disasters. *Purdah* makes women vulnerable not simply because they have less access to male-dominated evacuation shelters but because it enforces women’s dependence upon men for advance warning and preparedness information. Examples from Cambodia flood zone, rural Hawaii, Bangladesh, South Africa, and South Asia reveal that early warning systems fail to reach women. Men are more likely to have both time and the inclination to listen attentively to the radio and are much more likely to listen routinely. Women are usually too busy with domestic tasks to listen or to fully concentrate (Enarson, 2004). In another instance during the 1991 cyclone in South Asia, warning signals did not reach large numbers of women within the home or homestead, and died as a result. In a highly sex-segregated society, warning information was transmitted by men to men in public places where men congregated on the assumption that this would be communicated to the rest of the family, which by and large did not occur. Women who had comparatively less knowledge about cyclones and were dependent on male decision making, perished, many with their children, waiting for their husbands to return home and take them to safety (*ibid*).

According to Thorat (2008), disaster events often impact women disproportionately, endangering girls’ and women’s personal safety,



income sources, livelihood resources, environmental and economic assets, mental and physical health, future opportunities, social power, human rights, and, too often, life itself. Post-disaster mortality, injury, and illness rates are often higher for girls and women than boys and men. The loss of agricultural work for women farmers, the disruption of home-based industries, and low access to the financial and material aid is greater for women, compared to their male counterparts.

Most relief and recovery is delivered with the assumption that what is good for the household usually controlled by a man is good for a woman. Relief in the form of food, money, and other resources is sometimes issued to the male head of the household, thus increasing women's vulnerability and reinforcing their already low status (Schwoebel and Menon, 2004).

Relocation after disasters increases women's workloads, decreases their control over food and income, and disrupts their social support networks, i.e., friends, relatives, and neighbors, on whom they depended for practical and psychological support. Such support may include small loans of cash or other goods, sharing of equipment, sharing of childcare, and other forms of labor (*ibid*).

Domestic and sexual violence often increase in disaster situations. Women and girls become more vulnerable to sexual abuse and domestic violence and in some instances may be forced into prostitution to meet their basic needs. A poor, disabled, or aged woman heading the household is extremely vulnerable, as are young girls whose family structures have been shattered by disaster. Women and girls also report more symptoms of post-traumatic stress than men.

Gender relations severely limit the ability of women to respond to disasters. Cultural norms inhibit women from seeking and obtaining relief services. Food distribution, for example, targets the male head





of the household, which marginalizes women. Women are seldom represented in disaster management decision-making, as a result needs and interests are rarely addressed. While women generally are most vulnerable during and after disasters, they also have skills to manage family and household affairs that they bring to all phases of the disaster management cycle. Women often bear many responsibilities in disasters, particularly when men are absent.

Women are often the last to receive space in safe areas, temporary shelters, and other forms of emergency relief. Little attention is paid to women's needs in emergency relief provision in terms of privacy, personal hygiene, and sanitation. These needs are rarely considered in the design and planning for safe areas and temporary shelters.

Schwobel and Menon (2004) point out that disasters, by destroying sources of livelihood often increase women's workloads and decrease their access to and control over food and incomes. Girls and young women are more likely than boys and young men to drop out of their learning institutions in the wake of a disaster. In cases of dwindling income, their labor is most needed in the household.

As seen earlier, the experience of natural disasters in a wide range of contexts shows that events of this type can weaken the status of women and girls and their ability to negotiate both within and outside the family. The loss of assets, homes, and family members all contribute to increased gender inequality.

Tsunami and gendered consequences

According to Bourdieu (1977) gendered relations of power shapes everyday's realities. Any natural hazard, including the Tsunami, is not simply a natural phenomenon, but occurs in the world where institutions are shaped by gender power relationships. In the Tsunami, although both men and women were affected, its severity varied in accordance with the preexisting social, economic, and political





vulnerabilities. Gendered vulnerabilities, compounded by other factors such as caste, ethnicity, occupation, location, age, and disability influenced the differential impact between women, men, and *Aravanis*.

The gendered impact of the Tsunami has been captured in a number of research studies that have applied a gender framework of analysis. For example, a number of reports have highlighted the fact that many more women died in the Tsunami than men (Oxfam, 2005; Global Funds for Women, 2005; EKTA, 2006). Other reports have focused on how women—across caste, class, and occupations—have been disadvantaged in the Tsunami relief and recovery by preexisting gender norms and gender-neutral/blind state policies (Woman Kind, 2005). A study carried out by EKTA (2005) analyzes in detail the gaps in relief and rehabilitation measures and reveals that opportunities to reshape class, caste, and gender relations were missed out and in fact perpetuated post-disaster.

Among the affected communities, single women and households headed by women emerged as the most vulnerable groups. These women were excluded from the list of beneficiaries prepared by the Traditional Panchayats³ as the local patriarchal communities did not recognize women as heads of household. Among women, *Dalit*⁴ women also emerged as one of the most vulnerable groups (NAWO, 2006).

Women who survived and were housed in the camps found the shelter arrangements insensitive to their biological and gender-based needs. Although the lack of proper healthcare affected people in general, its impact was more severe on women as they are vulnerable to reproductive and sexual health problems. Needs like sanitary towels, undergarments, nutrition supplements for pregnant women, and certain gender-intensified needs like separate toilets and bathrooms were not adequately addressed (EKTA, 2005; NAWO, 2006).

Even within the fishing community, which remained the most visible in the global response to the Tsunami given its massive losses,





women remained marginalized with their PGNs being only partially met by the government and their SGNs remaining largely invisible.

Acknowledging the complexity involved in addressing gender and disasters, this study expands the understanding of gender mainstreaming by including *Aravanis*. The study provides insights into their lived experiences, along with those of women and men. It bridges a major gap in the existing body of knowledge by analyzing gender mainstreaming strategies of NGOs in the Tsunami disaster response using a gender mainstreaming framework and juxtaposing it with field-level realities.

Objectives

This study attempts to analyze the differential impact of the Tsunami on men, women, and *Aravanis*. It captures the experience of the most marginalized communities and of the women within them, i.e., experiences of unmarried girls, widows without children as against those of widows with children. Although the analysis focuses on women's lives, it does so with the understanding that their lives operate within a system of gender inequalities and gender power relations. The study also focuses on understanding the role played by NGOs at the time of the Tsunami, as they were working actively alongside government agencies in the delivery of relief and development of rehabilitation programs. An attempt has been made to look at the gender mainstreaming strategies of NGOs, an area, which has hitherto not been systematically analyzed. This initiative by the gender researcher and her team was made under the auspices of Anawim Trust and with support from Oxfam America to understand and analyze the steps taken by NGOs to enhance the agency of women, vulnerable men, and excluded groups (such as *Aravanis*), with the purpose of cross-agency learning and replication. This work therefore documents both the good practices as well as missed opportunities with the belief that these will deepen our understanding of "what works" and "what does not" in integrating





the SGNs and PGNs of both men and women in disaster response and preparedness.

The main objectives of the study are to

- Understand, document, and analyze the gender-differentiated impacts of the Tsunami.
- Analyze the gender mainstreaming strategies adopted by NGOs and humanitarian agencies in the Tsunami relief, rehabilitation, and reconstruction processes.
- Contribute to policy and advocacy efforts of mainstreaming gender in disaster preparedness, mitigation, and response.

Methodology

The present work is primarily qualitative in nature, as the real-life situations of women, men, and *Aravanis* are best expressed in their own words and may not adequately be captured through quantitative data. The analysis presented has drawn on both primary and secondary data. The desk research entailed reviewing the concepts of gender, gender mainstreaming, and the gender dimensions of disasters, including a review of existing studies on the Tsunami and Internet sources/websites of government agencies, INGOs, NGOs, and civil society networks on gender and disasters.

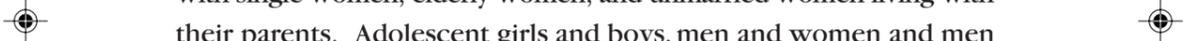
A group of 11 NGOs based in Tamil Nadu in the districts of Nagapattinam, Cuddalore, and Kanyakumari who expressed a willingness to collaborate in the study were selected for the study (see Annex 3). The primary data was collected from their field areas. Their vision, mission statements, and objectives were studied to understand how the themes of gender and women's empowerment are perceived and reflected in implementation of their programs. The Districts chosen were the most affected by the Tsunami. Time was a crucial factor in deciding how many NGOs could be covered within a period of 45 days, roughly 15 days for each of the districts.





Initially, 11 NGOs were selected. The eleventh NGO was added as they had initiated programs for mainstreaming the concerns of elderly women and men. Out of 11 NGOs, 4 were headed by women or had a woman in charge.

Field visits were facilitated by the participating NGOs who identified their best gender mainstreamed projects. One of the assumptions was that mainstreaming of gender would be reflected at the field level in program implementations and in the leverage accorded to women, marginalized men, and *Aravanis* for enhancing their social, economic, and political spaces.



Qualitative data was collated through focus group discussions (FGDs) as well as semi-structured interviews. A little over 150 FGDs were held with different groups of women, men, adolescent girls, and *Aravanis* across more than 45 Tsunami affected areas (see Annex-2) in the three Districts. Focus group discussions were held with single women, elderly women, and unmarried women living with their parents. Adolescent girls and boys, men and women and men with disability were also covered. Focus group discussions were also carried out with *Aravanis* in the three Districts; wherever needed, in-depth individual interactions were held. Discussions were also held with scattered poor such as the destitute, the *Narikuravars*,⁵ *Azhi* pickers,⁶ and other excluded groups on their accessibility to relief and rehabilitation entitlements. The FGDs were confined to the project areas of participating NGOs. Simultaneous FGDs with different groups provided insights into what has been achieved, what potential exists for furthering the process of equality outcomes, and what remains to be addressed.

The NGOs' experiences and gender mainstreaming strategies were analyzed using the Rao and Kelleher (2003) conceptual framework, which identifies gender mainstreaming at different levels: gender infrastructure, organizational change, and institutional change.



Approaches	Outcomes	Notes
Gender Infrastructure	Gender policy, including family-friendly policy. Gender in vision and mission. Gender unit/gender coordinator. Increased female staff and managers. Increased resources for programs targeting women. Changes in structure such as power relations, work-family balance.	
Organizational Change	Accountability to client constituency.	
Institutional change for Gender Equality	Analysis of institutions relevant to the program, developing programs and processes to challenge these institutional norms, building organizational capacities.	Institution such as family community-level institutions, the market and the state, etc.

Adapted from Institutions, Organizations and Gender equality in an era of globalization by Aruna Rao and David Kelleher (Source: Gender and Development, Vol.11.No.1, May 2003).

Additionally, those practices at the grassroots level, which meet the PGNs of women and men, in a way that positively impact on the transformation of institutional gender norms and values have also been documented.

Process of dissemination

Disseminating the field findings to the participating NGOs was an intrinsic part of the study. The intention of the study was to understand and contribute to the larger body of knowledge rather than to evaluate. After each phase of the fieldwork with a particular organization, field findings along with good practices were shared. Unaddressed issues and the emerging needs of women and men were also analyzed collectively. Output sharing was also carried out through e-mails whenever NGOs' heads were not available for discussion. The first draft of the research report was presented in a workshop in which partnering NGOs as well as other humanitarian organizations participated to obtain a feedback on the research findings.



Limitations of the study

This work has documented only those gender issues that emerged across Districts in the FGDs, irrespective of differences in caste and occupation. The findings emerging from the cited cases, however, cannot be generalized, given the limited number of cases. Where the information was extremely personal and sensitive, fewer cases were documented. Despite these limitations, the authors believe that even anecdotal evidence of neglect and victimization due to the gendered Tsunami response will serve as an important learning opportunity for those working in future disaster response and preparedness and will contribute to the documentation and analysis of gender issues in disaster response.

The study covers the period from June 2006 - June 2007. There may have been many changes since then, which are not followed up by this study, except for the policy responses on the controversial identity issue of the Aravanis, both in the broader context of development and the specific instance of Tsunami.

Structure of the book

This study is based on desk research and microfield data. Chapter 1 provides an overview of gender mainstreaming approaches in disasters, especially in the context of the Tsunami experiences in the worst affected Districts—Nagapattinam, Cuddalore, and Kanyakumari—of Tamil Nadu. Chapter 2 analyses the differential impacts of the Tsunami on women, men, and *Aravani* population and unfolds the institutional and policy responses through a gender lens. It discusses a gamut of issues (both socio-cultural and policy induced) that emerged over the course of more than 150 FGDs. The chapter also analyzes the relief, rehabilitation, and reconstruction policies of the government in the context of issues that were reflected in the narratives of the Tsunami-affected women, men, and *Aravanis*. Chapter 3 illustrates mainstreaming strategies of the participating NGOs, highlighting areas that can be further strengthened. Based





on the analysis of the NGOs' strategies in terms of gender infrastructure and the potential for organizational and institutional change, an attempt has been made to understand how gender is perceived by the participating organizations. Chapter 4 explores the possible directions for strengthening gender mainstreaming drawing from the good practices of the NGOs. The concluding chapter summarizes major insights gleaned through the analysis of gendered issues and gender-mainstreaming strategies.

End Notes

- ¹ *A childcare centre for children below 6 years of age, and a service provider, at the community level, for pregnant and lactating mothers. In addition, many of them provide mid-day meals to the elderly.*
- ² *Childcare centres, established by both government and NGOs to provide a safe and stimulating environment for young children, aged between 3-5. Catering to economically weaker sections, these centre provide an opportunity to children to learn and develop through play. In Tamil Nadu, Balwadis provide snacks and mid-day meals to meet the nutritional requirements of children.*
- ³ *Traditional local self-governance system. Unlike elected Panchayats with mandatory 33.3 percent representation for women, the traditional panchayat excludes women entirely or has minimal representation of them for example in Parish Councils in Kanniyakumari. In case of Irulas in some areas, i.e., Kalaigarnagar in Cuddalore, the representation is slightly higher but still falls short of a gender balance.*
- ⁴ *Dalit is the latest and currently most politically correct term used for the former "Untouchables" of India, who are still at the bottom of the social hierarchy in the Indian Society.*
- ⁵ *Narikuravars, an indigenous, gypsy community, are among the most marginalized communities of Tamil Nadu. Hunting was their main source of livelihood, but, with prohibition being placed on hunting in forests they have been forced to take up other activities, such as selling ornaments made of beads. They continue their nomadic lifestyle, moving from place to place to sell their wares. Children accompany adults wherever they move.*
- ⁶ *Azhi pickers are Dalit women and men whose main occupation is picking Azhi—a type of edible shell, mostly available in the backwaters. They spend nearly 8 hours, each day in the scorching sun, neck deep in the waters, with their kattumarams.*







II

Gender Differential Impacts of Tsunami

“Appa yerenda Aasthi Pochu, Amma yerenda ellaam pochu”

(When father dies only property is lost, but when mother dies, everything is lost)

*Suguna, * 18 years, Serathur, Nagapattinam,
who lost her mother in the Tsunami*

Through decades of research on disasters and their management, it has been well established that the differential impact of disasters is contingent on vulnerabilities of affected people. These vulnerabilities often systematically differ across economic class, ethnicity, age, physical conditions etc. with the gender dimensions cutting across all these, as well as other factors. In a given society, within any group, men and women exist in unequal power relationships that are shaped by social perceptions and gendered expectations. Consequently, people’s experiences of a disaster vary, as do their experiences of relief, rehabilitation, and reconstruction.

The impact of the 2004 Tsunami too was defined by vulnerabilities that arise from social, economic, and political exclusion and inequality. Death figures revealed a glaring gender gap in mortality rates of men and women. The disaster management processes of relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction were also influenced by preexisting vulnerabilities defined by gender, caste, class, religion, and ethnicity.

* All names in the field-based evidences are changed.

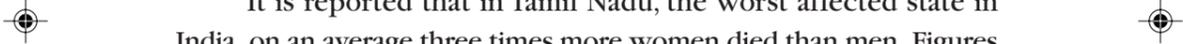




In this chapter we examine the differential impact of the Tsunami on the death rates of women, men, and the *Aravanis*. We explore gender issues that emerged in the context of the Tsunami relief and rehabilitation processes and analyze the responses of social institutions (households, communities, and the State) to the challenges posed by loss of lives and livelihood. We also show how institutions and policies either reinforce or challenge social inequalities and how pre-existing gender roles and relations have influenced the impact of the Tsunami.

Issues of survival, access to relief, conditions of temporary and permanent shelter; livelihood; political participation, gender roles and coping mechanisms, have all been looked through the gender lens. Policies have been analyzed in terms of their impact on women, men, and *Aravanis* in their real life, post-Tsunami situations.

Survival and survival related issues



It is reported that in Tamil Nadu, the worst affected state in India, on an average three times more women died than men. Figures compiled by Oxfam (cited in NAWO 2006) corroborate this finding.

According to government statistics, in Nagapattinam, the worst affected district of Tamil Nadu in South India, 2,406 women lost their lives in the Tsunami compared to 1,883 men.

In Cuddalore, the second most affected district, almost three times as many women than men were killed, i.e., 391 women and 146 men.

In Devanampattinam village in Cuddalore, for example, 42 women lost their lives compared to 21 men. In Pachaankuppam village the only deaths were those of women.

There were no official records of deaths of *Aravanis*. However our field research revealed that five *Aravanis* died in Veppanchery, Nagapattinam district.



According to our field research in certain places, the differences in death rates of women and men were significantly higher. In Samiarpet, Cuddalore district, for example, 12 times as many women died than men while in Chandrapadi village, Nagapattinam, and in Silladi Nagar (a Muslim temporary settlement) 4 times more women died than men.

Local survivors cite several reasons for greater number of deaths among women than men.

- When the Tsunami hit, many men were out fishing at sea, while the women were waiting near the shorelines for the boats to come in with the catch, which they would collect, clean, and carry to the market to sell.
- When the waves struck, women lost precious minutes as they tried to gather their children and the elderly before attempting to flee for their safety. Buffeted by fierce waves women did not have the strength to both hold on to a child and hang on to a branch or some other support to save themselves from being battered to death.
- Although the biological differences put women at a disadvantage (for example, pregnant women) the capacity to survive was determined largely, by socio-cultural norms. Many of the women and girls despite living in coastal communities do not maintain their swimming skills,¹ which they may have acquired as children (Murthy, 2005).
- The gender code of dress and hair, i.e., the saree² and long hair of women, also became death traps for them as they hampered fast movement the situation demanded (NAWO 2006). These also caused many to drown or get stuck in the thorny bushes and palm trees. Discussions with women in Sonan Kuppam, Cuddalore, revealed that in some cases, the waves were so violent that women were stripped of their clothes. Some





refused to climb naked into the rescue boats because of an internalized sense of shame and honor. Although many women reported that men asked them to give up their sense of shame and offered them their shirts to cover their bodies, women refused the offer due to underlying gender-based violence and post-survival consequences. A recent study on vulnerability of coastal communities to HIV/AIDS in the Tsunami-affected areas brought out the fact that some of those who were rescued by men were asked sexual favors in return; in some cases, women succumbed to their demands, due to a sense of obligation (SWASTI, 2007).

- During the Tsunami, many women lost their lives because they tried to rescue the children, the elderly and the sick. The dead bodies of many women were reportedly found intertwined with those of small children, and the aged (UNIFEM, 2005). In some cases women surrendered themselves to the waters because they saw their children carried away by the ferocity of the waves. The dominant identification of women with motherhood and the internalized values that assign the responsibility for child survival almost exclusively to women may have been the reasons for these deaths and possibly the deaths of their children too.³ While it has been pointed out that men who were out in deep sea were safe from the ferocious waves of the Tsunami that pounded the shore, field research indicates that even in places where both men and women were at home, larger number of women died than men. For example, in Nagaur district, a poor Muslim settlement, located in the proximity of seashore where households were engaged in small business activities, more women died. Many women who survived now belong to the even more vulnerable categories of widows and women heads of households. They experience poverty more severely than men similarly affected (widowers), due to unequal wages, lower position in the social hierarchy, constraints on their mobility imposed both by their





child caring roles and socio-cultural norms. A large number of men being rendered idle due to poor catch and loss of work days, has placed a disproportionate burden on women across occupations to evolve their own coping strategies for meeting the livelihood needs of their families.

Discussions with women in Keechankuppam, Nagapattinam, revealed that women with spouses who were disabled due to the injuries sustained in the Tsunami have become de-facto supporters of their households. In fishing communities, women previously engaged in unpaid household work found it difficult to adjust to carrying head loads and walking long distances to sell fish or cope with gender-based harassment in market places.

Access to relief

The state was prompt in responding to the disaster and moved quickly to meet the immediate needs of the affected people, delivering packages of cooked food, clothing, bed sheets, and other supplies. Relief camps were set up in a matter of hours in villages that had seen the loss of lives. However, some of the relief measures did not take into account the sex and gender-specific needs of women. As reported in focus group discussions (FGDs), this neglect was evident in the distribution of immediate relief packages, and in the distribution of cash compensation. Caste and occupation-based discrimination further compounded gender vulnerabilities, while *Aravanis* were almost completely excluded from the relief process.

The distribution of clothing illustrates the lack of attention to women's practical gender needs. Clothing supplied by the state did not meet women's needs across different ages and different communities. Inner garments were not included in the clothes' packages for both men/boys as well as women/girls. Young women and girls were more affected, as they felt uncomfortable and exposed without innerwear and sanitary towels when needed.⁴ Clothing





packages did not meet the needs of Muslim women as they did not contain the *Burqua* (a cloak worn by muslim women to cover the entire body, when in public place). For example, the Muslim women of Nagur in Nagapattinam reported major discomfort since their mobility in public spaces of the relief camps (such as toilets, water points and health centers) was constrained by the lack of *Burqua*. The failure to include women-specific clothing besides adding to women's discomfort, denied them their dignity and security needs. The lack of awareness about gender-specific needs of women is indicative of gender blindness present in most institutions of our society.

In the initial phase, the delivery of monetary relief was not based on an understanding of the gender roles of women and men. Hence, with the exception of women-headed households, cash relief was delivered to men because they are regarded the 'breadwinners' and income earners. However, this money was largely spent by men on alcohol, aggravating vulnerabilities of the households and creating more hardships for women, children, and the elderly. Subsequently, however, another Government Order recognizing the critical role of women in managing households, made it mandatory that relief including money for incidental expenses be handed over to women in the presence of community leaders (G.O No.57-4-2-2005).

When relief was routed through the traditional *Panchayats*, it often did not reach or only partially reached single and elderly women and men, even within their own community. Traditional *Panchayats* often operated under the assumption that single and elderly women are taken care of by their family members and hence do not require ration in their own right. Some were turned away by the public distribution system on the grounds that they receive old-age pensions and therefore do not require additional post-Tsunami rations. This socio-cultural exclusion forced single and elderly women (both widows and those living with their spouses) to resume work to fend for themselves and support their spouses. The traditional *Panchayats* also favored families with men going to sea for fishing as they paid taxes to the *Panchayats* (Womankind, 2005).



Women's identity and marginalization

Another important point that emerged from the study is the denial of individual identities to widows and unmarried women within households. This led to marginalization of unmarried women, widows without children, and elderly women and men especially in the intra-household distribution of relief for food and cash for incidental expenses. The situation in this regard seems to be the same not only in Nagapattinam and Cuddalore where the traditional panchayats are strong but also in Kanyakumari district where relief was mediated through religious institutions⁵.

Marginalization of other groups

Caste and occupation-based discrimination, socio-cultural exclusion coupled with the initial focus by the policy makers, almost completely on the fishing community, left others in the coastal economy at a severe disadvantage. *Dalits* and the *Irulas*⁶ in general, and women belonging to these communities in particular, bore a disproportionate burden of this discrimination. They were excluded from access to relief entitlements till the government subsequently extended these entitlements to the entire affected population of the coastal districts. However, at the time of research, certain groups remained excluded. The *Dalit Azhi* pickers in Mallumiyarpet, Cuddalore, for example, reported that they had received no relief, and did not know how to access their entitlements. The *Narikuaravars* and the homeless women, men, and *Aravanis* also remained excluded from the relief packages distributed both by the government and the NGOs.

Pre-Tsunami socio-cultural as well as policy-induced discrimination rendered the *Aravani* population invisible in the relief, rehabilitation, and reconstruction agenda. There were no official records of deaths and losses incurred by this group or the subsequent trauma and neglect they experienced. Their vulnerabilities were further exacerbated by their systemic exclusion from the mainstream gender discourse and thereby from post-disaster planning exercises.





75-year-old Selvi, her face lined with deep wrinkles and a bent back, has been selling earthen pots at the roadside near the fruit market in Cuddalore Old Town, long before the Tsunami. She was thrown out of her house by her son and daughter-in-law many years ago. She gets pots from a potter on credit and pays the potter after her daily sales. When asked if she paid any interest, she says she does not know. During the Tsunami, Selvi lost all her earthenware in the stampede that followed. Not having any documentation, (Her ration card is with her son and she has not been in contact with him for years), Selvi did not get any immediate relief or compensation for her loss. She is homeless and sleeps on the roadside. She is not a member of any self-help group (SHG) and has no information regarding any SHG program. She does not have access to any social security.



Temporary shelters

People affected by the Tsunami were moved from relief camps to interim temporary shelters. However, several gender issues related to privacy, space, security, and sanitation were not factored into the design and construction of these temporary shelters. Women survivors who were housed in these shelters found the arrangements to be insensitive to their sex and gender specific needs. These shelters did not provide enough privacy for women and girls and were small, dark, and without ventilation. Compounding matters these shelters prevented women from resuming their home-based occupations, such as sewing, beading, hand-fan making, etc., income from which contributed substantially in supporting the households; this intensified the sense of loss they experienced. In most instances men were provided with a common shed where they could socialize as well as mend their fishing nets, but no such public spaces were made available to women. This short-coming was felt acutely by women



and was voiced at all FGDs, in the areas covered by this field study.

The size of temporary shelters in most cases was uniform for all families, regardless of size, leaving large families with extremely restricted space. This negatively affected men as well as women. Similar concerns were voiced during the FGDs in all districts. Men were often forced to sleep outside and sustained insect bites and other wounds. Adolescent boys took to loitering outside the shelters leading to increased anxiety among women, as the shelters did not have secure doors or adequate lighting. Many widows with young daughters reported that security concerns kept

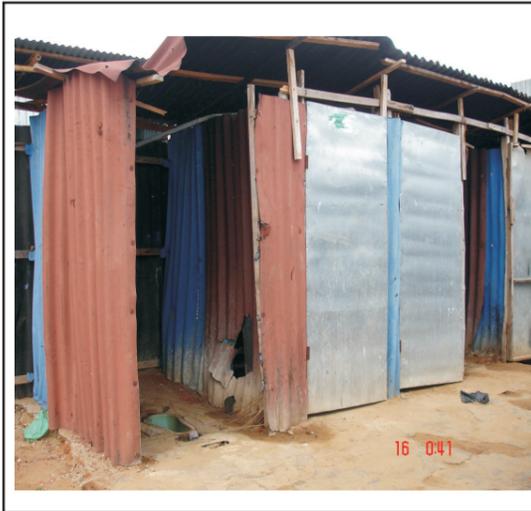
them awake most nights. In one of the temporary shelters in Keechankuppam, Nagapattinam, residents reported that a woman committed suicide following the unintended entry of a man who had mistaken the temporary shelter for his own. Constricted space also led to severe depression among some of the elderly.



Noor Jahan, a single woman, was a successful entrepreneur engaged in home-based business of hand fans pre-Tsunami in Silladi Nagar, Naga-pattinam. She had a ready market for her products in Delhi, Bombay, and Chennai. Her house was destroyed by the Tsunami along with all her tools of trade and huge stock of raw material. The temporary shelter did not have enough space for her to start her business again. She also needed a minimum amount of Rs 50,000 (approximate USD1250) for restarting her business. Today, she is unable to access credit from the bank or a private moneylender but is still confident, that given an opportunity and space to run her business, she can train many other women in the skill of making fans as well as provide them employment.



Adolescent girls, the Tsunami widows, young married women and men, and physically battered old women in the temporary shelters reported an increase in suicidal tendencies, increased blood pressure, severe depression, and a sense of helplessness. Poverty coupled with lack of privacy in temporary shelters



also led to an escalation in domestic violence against women and children.

The lack of functional toilets in many temporary shelters in Silladi Nagar, Nagapattinam, Kuzhaiyaru, Cuddalore, Chandrapadi, Nagapattinam, and Aruthenganvillai in Kanyakumari emerged as a major concern in the FGDs. The absence of community toilets and bathrooms made women feel unsafe as due to lack of privacy they generally used the toilets only at night or very early in the mornings. They could not use public spaces unless it was sufficiently dark and/or had a green cover providing some privacy (the Tsunami also denuded the area of green cover) and reported discomfort and adverse health effects related to suppressing the urge to defecate/urinate. With no functional community toilets⁷ or other private places, women lived in constant anxiety and discomfort. Men, on the other hand, were able to defecate along the seashore at any time.

Several suggestions emerged in the FGDs on how the toilets and temporary shelters could be made safer.



Benchmarks for Temporary Shelters Based on Women's/ Girls' Articulated Needs	Benchmarks for Gender Sensitive Toilets Based on Women's/Girls Articulated Needs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Adjacent temporary shelters should have adequate space between them. Temporary shelters should be made of sound proof and well insulated material that are resistant to both the heat and the cold. ● Within the temporary shelters there should be a strong partition ensuring a safe space for the personal needs of women and girls. ● Doors of the temporary shelters should be strong and secure. ● Kitchens should have chimneys. ● There should be provision of either solar lanterns or electricity in the night in common spaces as well as within the shelters. ● The size of the temporary shelter should be in accordance with the family size. ● A shed should be provided for women to engage in their home-based occupations; and spaces should be available for holding meetings and gatherings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● There should be larger number of toilets, (a ratio of one toilet to five shelters would be desirable) to prevent overuse and facilitate maintenance. ● Adequate water should be available in the toilets. Toilets should have strong and full-length doors. ● Doors should be provided with secure bolts. ● Toilets should have ventilators at a height from where none can peep through. ● The women's toilet should be closer to the shelters, while the men's should be further away. ● Toilets as well as the pathways leading to them should be well lit.

The systemic exclusion faced by the Aravanis before the Tsunami was reinforced in post-disaster management practices. Many Aravanis who were living with their non-Aravani friends were rendered homeless as the houses of these friends were destroyed in the Tsunami. Aravanis were not given place in temporary shelters and were deprived of the right to live with dignity. Many of them had no place where they could change their clothes. The FGDs with *Aravanis* revealed that this led them very often to change their clothes standing in the backwaters. Two years after the Tsunami, some of them were still on the streets and some living on charity of their non-Aravani



Padma and Kavya, aged 45, and 35, respectively, from Nagapattinam district, lost their rented house during the Tsunami in Thirukkadaiyur. With the exclusion of Aravanis in the immediate relief camps and later in the temporary shelters, they would sleep in the open with a known risk of gender-based violence. They reported that due to lack of privacy they had to change their clothes standing in the waters. As none of the Aravanis figured in the list of affected people they did not receive the immediate relief assistance of food, clothing, and bedding. They now live outside the temple shed on the charity of the temple priest but are not sure when they will be chased off.



friends. They live under constant threat of being thrown out any time and are resigned to their plight.

Permanent housing

The state policies regarding permanent housing, in the reconstruction phase, were both gender-neutral and transformative! It should be noted that even prior to the Tsunami, the government had granted joint entitlement to land ownership for habitats in some areas. This preexisting, transformative policy was preserved in the context of disaster reconstruction. Government Order (G.O. No. 172-30-3-2005), which requires that permanent housing be in the names of both women and men, challenges structural inequalities such as the prevailing customary norms of male ownership of land and property. The order also stipulated that houses in the name of women cannot be transferred to their husbands. It considers the sale of the house null and void for the first 10 years. This G.O. challenges customary norms of male inheritance by declaring that the eldest child, male or female, would have inheritance rights.



Manohari, a 45-year-old woman, mentioned, that since the age of 7 she started accompanying her mother who sold fish on the streets. For her, school was a place full of fun and laughter but out of her reach as her father was not in favor of sending a girl to school. Her



mother supported the household as her father spent most of the money he earned on drinking. As her mother aged she developed constant neck pain from carrying head-loads, Manohari took over the occupation. Being young, she faced constant harassment at the local fish market but quickly learned to tackle harassment in many forms: molestation, snatching off a good catch of fish by local goons, etc. The experience made her tough and ever more resolute to work harder so that she could educate her younger brothers. The brothers grew up, got married, and started living separately. They never contributed to the household, either financially or emotionally. Manohari in the rush of life forgot to think about herself. She remained unmarried because she never had time to think of her future, nor anyone in the family considered that she could have an existence other than making money for supporting the household. Even though, a bread winner, Manohari does not have a ration card in her own name. The unprecedented joint ownership of the post-Tsunami housing left Manohari bitter and wondering. The houses in the name of women jointly with the spouse after all are accepted by a community which never allowed a woman to own a house or a piece of land. Changes were happening around her. However, none cared for women like her, who are virtually heading as well as supporting the household. The post-Tsunami house is in the name of Manohari's old parents. Once the parents die, Manohari says, the house would be inherited by her brothers. She thinks about the time when she will find herself old and shelterless or living on the goodwill of her brothers in the house. She realizes she deserves a house in her own right as an individual, and it was time for the government to recognize this right. Giving unmarried women separate ration cards and housing would have given them the much needed dignity and security, Manohari asserts. Manohari and many women like her, see how policies impact on their personal lives. Manohari is hopeful that if this personal need could become a collective demand, there will be positive changes in their life situations.



However, the Tamil Nadu Government Order related to housing for Tsunami victims overlooked the case of single women (unmarried/divorced/widows), living with parents or other relatives. In many cases, despite their roles as primary breadwinners, these women feared that the houses would be inherited by their brothers, although younger to them, and regardless of these brothers never having supported the parents in their lifetime and living separately.⁸ Aware of this injustice, the affected women feel they would have been more secure had they been included in the joint ownership of the houses along with their parents.

An analysis of the discretionary powers held by the district administration in land allocation in village Kuzhaiyaru, Cuddalore district, reveals that unintendedly gender biases were reinforced. Widows without children were denied entitlement to the three cents⁹ of land in rural areas, while widows with daughters were given land and Rs.5,000 (approximate USD125) to build huts. Although no verification of these facts could be sought from the office of the district Collector in Cuddalore, the very fact that the community perceived in this manner reinforces the stereotype of identifying women with the motherhood.

On the other hand, the Irulas, who never owned pucca houses¹⁰ before the Tsunami have been given ownership of permanent houses post-Tsunami. These instances are examples of how reconstruction can provide the opportunity to move beyond status quo and effect transformative policies.

Hasina, aged 22, Kodimunai, Kanyakumari district, a qualified plumber from ITI, remains without a job and shelter. She was thrown out of her (non-Aravani) friend's house in the temporary shelter; though pre-Tsunami, she used to live with him. Living in the open is a terror for this young Aravani who needs a job badly and does not like to beg any more—she begged only to support her study in Bangalore. During her life in the open, she has been raped several times over; sometimes gang raped too. She feels a common shelter for Aravanis, with basic amenities, would give them a sense of security and, to some extent, prevent the type of trauma she is going through.



Reconstruction policies, however, did not play a transformative role in the case of *Aravanis*. As most *Aravanis* do not have ration cards, they were unable to have access to housing. Field research highlighted that the security needs of *Aravanis* are no less important than that of other vulnerable groups, yet their vulnerabilities worsened in the aftermath of the Tsunami. In our interactions with *Aravanis*, they reported that they did not want separate houses but a common shelter with basic amenities where they could live as a fraternity in security.

Ex-gratia¹¹

As noted by Murthy et al. (2006) the monetary payments from state and central government to those who had lost their immediate family members were generous. However, field research suggests that with a few exceptions¹² (G.O.Ms.No.6 dated 8-1-2005) the delivery of such payments was not based on a gender analysis of the differing roles of women and men. Monetary payment to men very often resulted in intra-household inequalities in access to and use of money for household sustenance, forcing women and children into secondary poverty¹³ (Adapted from Sarah Bradshaw, 2004). Despite the fact that income was ostensibly available to the household, sufficient funds were not directed to meet the needs of women and children.

Rajan, 35 years, with a daughter and a son, lost his wife in the Tsunami. He used up the ex-gratia money for drinking. His drinking continues unabated with borrowed money. Rajan has abandoned his parenting responsibility. The children are now living with their maternal grandparents, who themselves lost their assets in the Tsunami. Rajan never comes to see them and when asked to pay for the maintenance of the children, he abuses his wife's parents. He has even refused to pay any money toward the children's educational expenses, which would have helped the grandparents to tide over the difficult situation.

Focused group discussions with women in Pudupet, Cuddalore district, pointed out that when monetary payments were received

by women for the death of their spouses, the money was generally spent on meeting livelihood needs, settling debts incurred by their husbands for the productive assets pre-Tsunami, repairing houses, and for providing healthcare of children and elderly parents. As several studies point out, money given to women furthers the fulfillment of the basic needs of the entire family (Murthy and

Savitri, aged 40 years, married to a non-Aravani, was well accepted in her spouse's family, particularly by her mother-in-law who never taunted her. Her name was also included in the ration card. Savitri's spouse and mother-in-law died in the Tsunami. The Ex-gratia amount due to Kalyani for her spouse's death was taken by her father-in-law after kicking her out of the home. Savitri had nowhere to go and had to migrate against her wishes to Bombay to make a living.(focus group discussion with Aravanis in Cuddalore district).

Sankaran, 2001). Interestingly, the Tsunami widowers who started taking care of their children and took up household chores along with their daughters reported the same spending pattern. However, both men and women, in some instances, have spent the entire sum for marrying off their daughters.

In cases, where men spent the money on drinking and gambling, there was a rise in domestic conflicts not only between the spouses but also between fathers and children. While boys started spending more time outside their houses, girls could only 'wish' to get away from their houses and domestic responsibilities. Driven by heavy depression, some are reported to have even committed suicide.¹⁴ In Keetchankuppam, Nagapattinam district, a young girl committed suicide after her father remarried shortly after he received the monetary payment for his wife's death. Yet, another girl in Tudvai, Nagapattinam, stated that she was struggling with suicidal feelings after her mother's death, as her father had increased his drinking and started verbally abusing her and her siblings (FGDs with adolescent girls). There are also reported instances of abandonment of parenting responsibilities by men after receiving the monetary compensation for the death of the wife (*Ibid*).



The amount and delivery of ex-gratia was not based on a gender analysis of the differing roles of women and men. On one hand, men are considered the breadwinners and the source of primary income (the government pension policy underpins the breadwinner role of husbands and sons), on the other hand, the semi-orphans, who lost their fathers, have not been offered the same compensation as orphaned children. Women who were engaged in household work and dependent on the income of their deceased husbands are still not engaged in productive work. However, the share a child gets in the case of the death of his/her father is only Rs.50,000, (approximate USD1,250) much below that of an orphaned child who received an ex-gratia amount of Rs.200,000 (approximate USD5,000) Socio-cultural norms also mediated the payment of ex-gratia amount. In households where only children had died, men received 200,000 (approximate USD5,000) and above depending on how many children had been lost to the Tsunami. The payment was based on the headship rather than on an analysis of who is responsible for sustaining of the households.

Focus group discussions revealed that unmarried women, who had been supporting but not heading households, did not receive any share in the Ex-gratia amount, although it was shared among brothers. In some instances, the money has either been kept aside for the dowry of the younger sister or deposited in the name of the son. ex-gratia, based on head counts, in the names of men in case of surviving couples, also reinforced existing gender inequalities.

The procedure for applying for ex-gratia for missing persons was a lengthy and stressful experience, especially for traditionally house-bound women with low levels of legal awareness and lack of communication skills and mobility in public spaces. One of the Tsunami widows reported running from pillar to post to get ex-gratia payment for her missing son. She spent a sum of Rs.50,000 in the process (In-depth interaction with a widowed woman in C. Pudupettai, Cuddalore district).





In the case of Aravanis who died during the Tsunami, no ex-gratia was paid to their closely-knit community, which is a network of filial relationships. For example, due to institutional discrimination, a married Aravani, in spite of her inclusion in the ration card, was denied her rightful claim to ex-gratia.

The research highlighted the importance of a gendered analysis of roles, norms, and behaviors in pre-disaster times. Such an exercise would have made visible the socially constructed roles and relations of women and men, their possible coping strategies and spending patterns in the given context. It would also have made the stakeholders aware of the consequences of disaster on the *Aravani* population.

Impact on health and wellbeing

The Tsunami gave rise to a number of health problems, that emerged in the context of the Tsunami and its aftermath. A gendered analysis of health issues reveals how women's health was more adversely affected than men's health. There was an increase in the work burden of women especially those who cared for the disabled, declining in their nutritional levels and increase in sexual and reproductive health problems. An increase in alcohol abuse among men leading to violence against women became matters of serious concern. Certain communities that were involved in finger fishing also faced occupational health risks which affected women disproportionately due to their shouldering both productive and reproductive roles, while the health needs of the *Aravanis* remained unaddressed in the Tsunami response.

a) The Tsunami-induced injuries

Initially there was a major and justifiable focus by the government and NGOs on assessing the death toll, and on compensating households who had lost members to the Tsunami. Injuries and disabilities caused by the Tsunami largely unnoticed, bearing long-term consequences for the survival conditions of affected individuals and households.





The Tsunami-induced injuries severely impacted the health and economic well being of both women and men. Severe and permanent disabilities prevented many from working. However, these opportunity costs were not factored into the determination of compensation (*ex-gratia*) amounts. The realistic cost of treatment for injuries and disability were also not accounted for. In some cases, the cost of treatment of severe injuries has far exceeded the government-stipulated amount of Rs.25,000. (approximate USD 625)

In cases pertaining to grievous injuries, complicated procedures and narrow deadlines resulted in denial of compensation. In some households where members were undergoing treatment, it was reported that they had to spend more than Rs.1,000 (USD25) per month on medical expenses, leading to a severe shortfalls in household income.

b) *Increased burden on women, girls and boys*

Both men and women suffered injuries during the Tsunami, but the long term consequences were different for each. As noted by Murthy and Sankaran (2001), gender-based division of labor has both a direct and indirect bearing on poverty and health. Heavier workloads of women, led to higher levels of ill health, giving them less time to recuperate.

In times of crisis, women fall back on the elasticity of their time, which stretches in proportion to the severity of the situation, to devise new coping and income-generation strategies. Focus group discussions revealed that where men had become unfit to work due to injuries, the burden on women, girls, and boys increased considerably. Women have become sole bread-winners in households where men have suffered injuries. They have had to struggle to sustain their families with fewer resources, often bearing high medical expenses as well as the burden of caring





for those who were disabled by the Tsunami. Where women were disabled, girls were overburdened with household chores, i.e., cooking food, taking care of their siblings and mothers, and fetching water and fuel wood, while a number of boys dropped out of school to work and supplement family income.

Valarmathi, a 35-year-old construction worker, fell down while running for safety and severely injured her neck. She can no longer carry head loads at the construction sites. Her family has fallen into deeper debt due to increase in costs of her treatment. Valarmathi also dropped out of the SHGs group because of her inability to contribute money to the SHG. As a result, her daughter aged 10, studying in Class V, had to take on household responsibilities, i.e., taking care of younger siblings, cooking, cleaning, and fetching water and firewood. She also takes care of her sick mother. She has not, however, dropped out of school although she is unable to finish her homework regularly.

The destruction of substantial green cover and loss of livestock following the Tsunami caused a shortage of firewood as well as fuel cakes (made from animal manure), forcing women and girls to cover greater distances and spend more time collecting firewood. Though the government as well as NGOs distributed kerosene stoves in rural areas, the people were unable to use them as they were unfamiliar with their operation.¹⁵ Focus group discussions with women in Poraiyar, Nagapattinam, revealed that after the Tsunami, they were required to walk 15–20 kilometers (about 4 trips of 3–4 kilometers each) to collect a week's supply of firewood. This has obvious implications for the health of women and girls as the calories spent on these activities far exceed their intake (Venkateswara et al., 1996).

c) *Poor nutrition*

Focus group discussions with women across several villages revealed that one of the coping strategies adopted by women in crisis situations was to cut down on the quantity they ate,





- *For many fisherwomen, the number of working hours has increased because of the decline in fish catch after the Tsunami. They have started going to Kanyakumari in the evening at 6 p.m. and returned home only at 2 a.m. in the morning. Segregating and ice packing the fish takes them another hour or so. The arduous work schedule, without compromising the household chores, has had an adverse impact on their health and they are chronically fatigued.*
- *In Silladi Nagar women walk 4 kilometers to access ration from the Public Distribution System. They return with the rations by auto, thus spending a sizeable amount of money on transport, which could otherwise have been spent on other basic needs. This stress on women and household economy could have been avoided if a ration shop had been temporarily located in the vicinity of the temporary shelters.*
- *I never went for fish vending but I am going now. The injury (points to her lacerated abdomen and swollen back) has made it difficult for me to carry head loads. Sometimes, I take an auto along with others but at other times I walk in pain.” Meenakshi C., Pudupettai, Cuddalore district.*

to better manage the scarcity of food. This coping strategy was largely dictated by social norms, which often require that women eat last and least in their households. It was also observed that women who were fish vendors and daily wage earners, seldom ate thrice a day; they had to forgo either their breakfast or lunch. This was partly due to their work schedules and partly due to the fact that many could not afford an additional meal. Post-Tsunami, women who lost livestock reported a steep decline in their consumption of milk and curds. There was also loss of income from the sale of milk. In villages in Nagapattinam and Cuddalore districts, the ingress of sea water resulted in destruction of kitchen gardens leading to reduced consumption of vegetables, especially green vegetables, thus affecting the nutritional status of the household, particularly of women and girls.

d) *Reverse sterilization*

Following the Tsunami, reverse-sterilization (or recanalization) surfaced as a major health and social issue for women. Women



who lost their children in the Tsunami were not only blamed for the death of their children but were strongly influenced to undergo recanalization to have children irrespective of their age, traumatized mental state, and physical health conditions. The process of recanalization meant that the fallopian tubes, which had undergone 'tubal ligation' during sterilization to block the pathway of the ovum, would be reconnected through surgery.

The G.O. issued in this regard stated that the State would extend full assistance to those who lost their children in the Tsunami and desired to undergo recanalization. It clarified that couples opting for recanalization to reverse tubectomy or vasectomy¹⁶ a monetary assistance of Rs.25000 (USD625) would be offered for surgeries performed in private hospitals, while the government hospitals would perform them free of cost.

The G.O. facilitating reversal surgeries had a mixed impact. While, ostensibly giving reproductive choices to women in deciding whether or not to conceive again, the order unintendedly fed into the existing cultural biases against married women 'being childless.' In a milieu, where the primary function of married women is to bear children, women have little room to make an informed choice. Consequently, many women, who had lost their children, faced pressure from their spouses, families, and communities to opt for reversal surgery. Many of them succumbed, fearing that, if they failed to conceive, the likelihood that their husbands would remarry with backing from friends and relatives would increase. Infact the value attached to childbearing is so deeply entrenched that in some cases the wives themselves pleaded with their husbands to remarry.

Field interactions revealed high levels of frustration, feelings of inadequacy, and guilt among women who did not conceive after recanalization. The long-term impact of recanalization on the reproductive health of women and the success rate of such





surgical interventions were not clear to most women. Out of 16 women who underwent reversal surgeries in Aaryanattuthuru and Akkaripettai, Nagapattinam, four women conceived and successfully delivered.¹⁷ In Nambiar Nagar, Nagapattinam, out of 10 women who had undergone recanalization, none became pregnant and in Keechankuppam only 5 out of 52 conceived.¹⁸

Anbuja, aged 37, of Chandrapadi, Nagapattinam, lost all her four children in the Tsunami. She underwent the reversal surgery in Chennai, which cost her Rs 150,000 (USD3750) but has not conceived. Her entire focus is on how to conceive again and have at least one child. Her depression becomes severe when she hears that other women have become pregnant after the surgery. Now she is financially better off—she got Rs 800,000 (USD20,000) as compensation for her lost children—but says that she does not find a meaning to her life. She also feels hurt when the community perceives her to be one of the privileged for her enhanced material status (she is no longer economically poor). Anbuja, however, feels that she is poorer, unhappy, and emotionally drained than she was pre-Tsunami.

However, studies have also pointed out that the state package for recanalization was

offered when normalcy of life was not yet restored, which is one of the preconditions for delivering a healthy baby. Besides there was a high incidence of reproductive health problems, along with psychological trauma among women that obviously raised questions about child bearing and the subsequent physical and psychological consequences on both women and the children.

e) *Alcohol consumption*

Alcohol consumption among men increased following the Tsunami. This was in part a socially condoned coping strategy to deal with the stress and trauma of the disaster and in part a response to the availability of ready cash through relief. Numerous FGDs revealed that the increase in the consumption of alcohol post-Tsunami aggravated conditions of wheezing, asthma, and general weakness among men. As a result some of





them found themselves unfit to work. The discussions also revealed that men whose wives were injured in the Tsunami justified their increased intake of alcohol to the frustration they experienced because their wives were sick at home. Many women cited that increased alcohol consumption also led to increased depression and violence within the home.

f) *Occupational health risks*

The health risks encountered by seashell collectors, *Azhi* pickers, and finger fishers belonging to the *Dalit* and *Irula* communities increased manifold post-Tsunami. *Dalit Azhi* pickers spend nearly 8 hours standing neck-deep in the waters, under the scorching sun with their *Kattumarams*. Infections and injuries to their feet and fingers due to *Azhi* bites, causing temporary disability are a common occupational hazard. Post-Tsunami, deposits of thorny bushes, rubble, and debris in the backwaters further increased their risk of injuries. It was also evident that the Tsunami rehabilitation efforts had bypassed this occupational group and health interventions were not designed to accommodate these occupational hazards. Men and women *Azhi* pickers reported that they would like to give up their risky occupation, if they were given options.

Male *Azhi pickers* use goggles to protect their eyes from the harsh sunlight; however, women do not use goggles as they associate them as part of male outfits. Some NGO.s who distributed protective glasses only to men post-Tsunami further reinforced this stereotype. Hence, practical gender needs (PGNs) of women *Azhi* pickers, i.e., good quality gloves as well as protective sun glasses and *Kattumarams* were overlooked. Both women and men *Azhi* pickers suffer from severe back pain, frequent fever, asthma, and seizures. Women, in particular, suffer severe abdominal and hip pain, giddiness and excessive bleeding





during menstruation, because of the physical strain of pushing a Kattumarams with one hand and picking up *Azhis* with the other. Finger fishers from the *Dalit* and *Irula* communities experience similar problems.

Women in these occupations were seen to be doubly disadvantaged. After spending long hours in the water, on returning home they had to take care of household chores. Women in Malumiyarpet, Cuddalore, complained that while men



Azhi picker's occupation requires them to stand neck-deep in the backwaters for many hours every day. They get severe Azhi bites. Most of the post-Tsunami health interventions have not conceived addressing such occupational hazards. Similarly many other individuals in remote areas have suffered injuries during the Tsunami but are left untreated.

had time to relax and drink, “to forget physical pain and have good sleep,” women relied on painkillers and suffered from insomnia.

Although some of the health effects and vulnerabilities described here are not Tsunami-specific, they remain an important part of the “disaster vulnerability context” (Lewis, 1999). Development processes, which are not able to offer livelihood security to vulnerable women and men, push them to take up risky occupations, which, in turn, make them more vulnerable to disaster as well as poor post-disaster recovery processes.





g) *The health concerns of Aravanis*

Because of severe injuries on their legs and back, many *Aravanis* were not able to earn a living as they could not dance or beg. Although the doctors in government hospitals treated the injured *Aravanis*, they did not receive the cash compensation of Rs.5,000 which was given to women and men.

Discussion with *Aravani* Groups in Nagapattinam and Cuddalore districts revealed that the vulnerability and health of *Aravanis* more often than not gets mentioned only in the context of HIV/AIDS. However, other health issues, such as lack of basic amenities, i.e., toilets and drinking water, food security, and insecure livelihoods of *Aravanis* were generally overlooked in the Tsunami response and rehabilitation process. Despite the massive involvement of humanitarian and human rights organizations and their emphasis on putting in place interventions for transformation, in the recovery phase, this vulnerable group remained marginalized and out of the mainstream of post-disaster planning exercises.

Access to social safety provisions : pensions and Public Distribution System

The Tsunami presented an opportunity for all social actors including the government, to re-examine social welfare policies and their implementation to address gender concerns. Interventions such as simplifying application procedures, increasing awareness about various schemes, and sensitizing concerned officials to provide speedy, gender-sensitive implementation, and sustained monitoring could have been put in place. Yet, for the destitute and

Gomathi in Perumalpettai, Nagapattinam, found it difficult to support her bed-ridden husband post-Tsunami, without additional monetary support. With support from the women's group, she decided to declare herself a widow, even though her husband was alive. Now she gets a pension. Another widow in Cuddalore, on the advice of the concerned official, managed to receive pension under the pretext that she did not have a son. According to her, it is as good as "not having a son when they do not respect and support us."



elderly populations that depended upon existing pension schemes, this opportunity was missed. It emerged, from the FGDs that destitute widows, irrespective of their age, with or without sons were not aware of the pension schemes. This lack of awareness concerning welfare schemes was also true in the case of deserted women above the age of 30 years.

In rural areas, widows generally do not get remarried due to internalized patriarchal norms and other considerations that stem from their subordinate position in the society, which outweigh socially and culturally perceived advantages of remarriage.¹⁹ This is so, even in areas where remarriage of widows is being consciously encouraged post-Tsunami, i.e., in Kanyakumari district. Discussions with officials in the district collector's office in Chennai revealed that there was a common understanding among the officials, that a woman must wait for 5 years after separation or desertion before receiving a pension. This assumption however does not reflect knowledge of the prevailing socio-cultural norms and gender roles.

As outlined above among the marginalized, women without children, unmarried women not heading households, destitute women, women with only girls, elderly women and men, and women with disabled or chronically sick spouses remained the most vulnerable. The lack of clearly articulated policies that focused specifically on the needs of these groups contributed to further marginalization in the disaster-management process.

It was observed during the course of field research that reconstruction in the post-Tsunami period did not focus on improving the social infrastructure of *Dalit* areas. It was also evident that health subcenters, ration shops (Public Distribution System), and water collection points, which were located in the adjoining areas where the fishing community lived, received most of the attention.

Another related issue highlighted by the field interactions was that many elderly women and men often went hungry, especially in





Chinnamaal, a 65-year-old of Cuddalore Old Town, lived with her granddaughter, aged 12 years. They survived on boiled shells that Chinnamaal finger fished in the backwaters. During holidays her granddaughter also accompanied her for finger fishing. The neighbors pointed out that this was the only way they could survive.



Chinnamaal did not have a ration card nor did she have any information about old-age pensions. When informed about the old-age pension scheme, she said it would do her and her granddaughter a lot of good if someone could help her to access it. She was also unaware of post-Tsunami governmentschemes for the Tsunami-affected children.

Dalit villages, due to loss of agricultural wage labor. Even before the Tsunami, wages of agricultural laborers were declining due to changes in land use patterns driven by commercialization of land. The ingress of sea waters into existing agricultural lands added to their woes. The economic vulnerability of *Dalit* agricultural workers underscores the importance of including access to social safety nets as an integral component of disaster preparedness (Lewis, 1999).

A crucial component in mitigating the impact of disaster among the poorest and most vulnerable categories of women, men, and *Aravanis* is the need for accessible and gender-sensitive, social welfare provisions.

a) *Access of Aravanis to social security*

At the time of the study, *Aravanis* remained a group that was not covered by any of the proactive social security scheme²⁰ (G.O. Ms. No.199 dated 21.12.2006), which was introduced a few months later. It is also evident that in the context of the Tsunami there has been no focus on this group. Most *Aravanis* earn a living through begging or dancing. Discussions with



various groups of *Aravanis* revealed that they do not possess ration cards. The exclusion of *Aravanis* in government policy and gender discourse has largely rendered them invisible. This invisibility was compounded in the aftermath of the Tsunami. They often faced hunger/starvation, homelessness and institutional rejection and were even pushed into prostitution.

A typical conversation narrated by Rajam, Nagapattinam, when they go to apply for a ration card.

Are you a man or a woman?
Man
You do not look like one
I am Aravani
But you need to fill this column that asks of sex : M/ F
Then, put me in the category of woman
Well, can you give birth to a child?
No
Then get away, you are not eligible for something that is meant for either a man or a woman.*

* "I am not a man trying to be a woman. It is your society's problem that you only recognize two sexes" (Hijira/Aravani Mona Ahmed to author Dayanita Singh in *Myself Mona Ahmed*)

b) *Poor implementation and lack of awareness*

Even where welfare policies and programs are in place, their poor implementation and lack of awareness of the existing schemes become a barrier for accessing basic entitlements among vulnerable women and men and *Aravanis*. For example, post-Tsunami, although there was a focus on building Balwadis where none previously existed, Anganwadis were seen functioning in very few areas. Within the villages visited across all three districts, almost no one knew about the role that Anganwadis can play in ensuring the food security of the elderly. Where Anganwadis were previously functioning, there was a huge demand by impoverished families for restarting them for elderly women and men (Silladi Nagar, Nagapattinam district).²¹





Livelihood

The Tsunami had a devastating effect on coastal livelihoods—both on the fishing and non-fishing sectors of the economy. Field-level interviews and FGDs with workers in these sectors reveal that income levels fell substantially. As a consequence, women, in particular, have had to compensate for the loss of household income by devising new livelihood sources and coping strategies.

Pushed by a dwindling income, increased expense on alcohol, and battering by her husband, Kalyani from xxx started selling fish in the daytime and had to resort to prostitution at night. Her daughter used to go and stay with Kalyani's mother at night. Kalyani needed the money for her daughter's upkeep as she wants her to be educated so that she does not have to lead a life similar to hers. Kalyani says she is not bothered about the comments of her community members, because it is not they who have to feed her children or educate them (The location is not revealed here on the request of Kalyani; the name is changed to maintain the confidentiality).

The above example highlights the gendered impact of the Tsunami on livelihood of men and women. Post-Tsunami, an increasing number of women became sole breadwinners, due to the death of or severe injuries suffered by their husbands/sons. In some cases, women had to resort to prostitution as a means of providing income for their families.

With the Tsunami-affected households sinking deeper and deeper into debt, women also had to take on the responsibility of repaying additional debts. In many cases women started selling their labor and fish catch at prices lower than the market price, to moneylenders. Some women had no option but to take up jobs as domestic servants in relatively well-off households with long hours and low pay. The salaries at times were as low as Rs.150 (USD3.75) per month.

Although wage opportunities decreased for both women and men post-Tsunami, men had the option of migration to increase their chances of finding work, while women stayed behind with their



families. Generally men migrated to nearby areas for 7-15 days in a month. However, the earnings they brought home were less than half of what they used to earn pre-Tsunami. Focus group discussions with women in Cuddalore and Nagapattinam revealed that women attributed this fact to an increase in daily expenses by men while they were away from home. They stated that a lot of money was spent by men on food, alcohol, and travel. As a result at times they came back with paltry sums and their excuse was that they had been robbed. According to women in the focus groups, there is a possibility that men had spent the money on having sexual relations outside of marriage. A study on the vulnerability of the coastal community to HIV/AIDS in the areas affected by the Tsunami underscores the link between male migration and the rising risk of HIV/AIDS among couples (SWASTI, 2007).

Field interviews and FGD in Samiyarpettai, Cuddalore, revealed that women, who were exclusively responsible for childcare and did not have a reliable support system, faced major difficulties while working outside the home. Women previously engaged in unpaid household work now felt the need to engage in paid work but were unable to do so because of lack of childcare facilities with sensitive and suitable timings. Single men responsible for childcare and household work also had similar needs for childcare services.

The salinization of cultivable lands and loss of livestock caused by the Tsunami adversely affected both women and men farmers and women engaged in maintaining kitchen gardens. Traditionally, many of the women in the affected villages grew vegetables in kitchen gardens, which ensured that essential household nutritional needs were met to some extent and served as a survival strategy in times of crisis. Often women also generated savings from sale of dairy or kitchen garden products without the knowledge of their men. The loss of kitchen gardens hence affected both women's earnings and coping capacities.





Field interactions highlight that elderly women have been rendered particularly vulnerable. Pre-Tsunami, many of them were engaged in agricultural wage labor and livestock rearing. However, post-Tsunami, work opportunities have reduced and they have been unable to get work. Some elderly women, who had given up fish vending due to old age and physical frailty, have also been forced to resume work after the Tsunami. Many of them have had to incur heavy loans from private moneylenders to avoid starvation and feed the dependents in the family. The PGNs of these women in terms of transportation, healthcare facilities, or access to old-age pensions have not been taken into account in post-Tsunami rehabilitation response.

Where boys are concerned, gender stereotypes put boys under pressure to drop out of school to work on the boats to contribute to the family income. In Kanyakumari and Nagapattinam, boys have started going to the sea to work as wage laborers and are compelled to remain away from their families for long periods.

The institutional exclusion of *Aravanis* pre-Tsunami is reflected in their exclusion from the rehabilitation process. Some of them reported that they can no longer dance due to the Tsunami-induced injuries to their legs, thus losing a major source of their income apart from begging.

a) *The Gendered impact of the livelihood response*

Field interactions clearly brought into focus the plight of women, particularly single women and the elderly, and the need for livelihood rehabilitation and compensation programs to meet their needs. However, as the following examples illustrate, many of the government's compensation policies have not adequately addressed the needs of women.

Before the Tsunami, women whose husbands were disabled or chronically sick were the de facto owners of boats, Kattumarams,





and nets. Sons would use their mothers' assets, giving these women greater status in the home. Post-Tsunami when their boats and nets were destroyed, the government compensation restored assets in the names of the sons rather than the mothers. Similarly, women who lost both their husbands as well their assets, i.e., boats, nets, Kattumaras, and tools, did not receive any compensation from the government for the loss of their productive assets, thus reinforcing the stereotypes of male 'breadwinners.' Many women reported that moneylenders approached them as soon as they came to know about the ex-gratia payment for the death of their husbands. As a result they ended up spending the entire ex-gratia payment to pay off the debts incurred by their husbands for buying boats and nets. This increased the vulnerabilities of the women-headed households, post-Tsunami.

The livelihood recovery policies and programs promoted both by the Government and humanitarian agencies also failed to respond to the loss of productive resources such as tools and materials used in home-based work and micro-enterprises. Personal assets of crucial value such as small savings, jewelry, sarees, and household goods were not taken

- *Pre-Tsunami in Perumalpettai, Nagapattinam district, two SHGs had together managed the business of selling dry fish. The SHGs took a loan of Rs.200,000 (USD5000) and built an infrastructure to dry fish and invested Rs.100,000 (USD2500) in fish stock, salt, utensils, and other tools. They repaid half the loan pre-Tsunami but lost everything in the Tsunami. Their loss has neither been compensated nor the remaining loan amount of Rs.100,000 (USD2500) waived or rescheduled by government agencies. The members had to finally repay the loan by incurring heavy debts and pawning their jewelry.*
- *In Jeeva Nagar, a Dalit village of Nagapattinam, 300 livestock, mainly goats, were lost. It was reported that they were not able to access compensation as they were asked to show the carcasses of the lost livestock which the women and men had disposed off due to health and hygiene concerns.*



into consideration in loss assessments. Such assets formed an important part of household savings and survival strategies as they could easily be converted into cash by selling or pawning.

Another issue that emerged during the field research was that although members of women's SHGs incurred heavy losses in their micro-business activities, their loans were neither waived off nor were their assets restored.

As noted earlier, livestock-rearing is a main source of livelihood for women engaged in subsistence economies. Women, especially the elderly, were rendered destitute, since the G.O. (Ms. No. 39 Dated 25.1.2005) relating to compensation for livestock was not implemented in many areas.²²

Stereotyped perceptions of occupations and asset ownership appear to have influenced both gender and caste identities in the policy discourse. *Dalit* women who used *Kattumarams* remained invisible in the relief process, as the use of *Kattumarams* and



boats is normally associated with fishermen. Women who collect and sell *Azhi* also use *Kattumarams*, but were not compensated for lost boats or stocks of *Azhi*.

The PGNs of men at the lower rung of occupational hierarchies, sometimes intersecting with caste and ethnicity, have also not been taken into account. Electricians and carpenters who worked on the boats and trawlers did not get any replacement for





their lost tools. Small fish workers, marginalized even pre-Tsunami by commercialization and mechanization of boats and the spread of aqua-culture (ICSE, 1996; Sharma, 1998), have been adversely

Irula women and men who borrowed from moneylenders (belonging to the fishing community) had to part with their best catch of fish and sell it at the price fixed by them, which was 50 to 75 percent lower than the market price. Similarly, widows and elderly women who sold fish had to buy the fish from moneylenders belonging to their own community at a higher price due to their weak negotiating power, thus reducing their profit margins.

affected by the indiscriminate distribution of Fiber-glass Reinforced Plastic (FRP) boats which have replaced Kattumaram based fishing activities in several villages in the three districts.

In some instances, elderly men who used to go to sea on their Kattumarams have been excluded from the distribution of new boats by the traditional *Panchayats* that manage the distribution of the Tsunami relief. Depriving elderly men of their



occupational assets placed a disproportionate burden on elderly women for meeting the household needs.

Gender roles and relations post-Tsunami

The Tsunami and the various Tsunami-related interventions by the government and NG.O.s contributed both to perpetuating and transforming gender relations at the household and community levels.





a) *Post-Tsunami marriages*

In the months following the Tsunami, a spate of marriages, of young teenage girls, occurred that have since come to be referred to as Tsunami marriages. Survey records reveal 7 cases of early marriages in Kesavpaliyam, Cuddalore, while in 32 villages in Nagapattinam district, 210 marriages of girls below 18 years of age took place within two to three months subsequent to the Tsunami (Interactions with PEDDA). The Tsunami marriages occurred among all communities, irrespective of class, caste and religion. Delving deeper to examine the reasons for the occurrence of these marriages, the field study revealed how the Tsunami marriages are a striking illustration of the differential impact of a disaster and its management:

Firstly, the disaster and its aftermath underscored sharply the deeply rooted and widely spread gender inequities:

- In a culture where girls are regarded as a burden and their marriage and dowry expenses a looming issue, the Tsunami aftermath presented an opportunity. As simpler, inexpensive marriages are socially condoned during hard times many young girls were married off in a hurry, and in the process deprived them of their rights to education and reproductive health. In many instances girls as young as 14 to 18 years were married off to much older men in the age group of 40–50 years.
- There were also many cases of young boys who married prematurely following the Tsunami. This research showed the primary reason for this was that these boys prior to the Tsunami were being raised by their widowed or single mothers, On the death of their mothers in the Tsunami, they were unable to keep house and care for themselves, a state of affairs fostered by traditional exclusion from participation household work, hence marriage was the only option.





- Similarly men who lost their wives (these were large in number as many more women than men died in the Tsunami) found themselves unprepared for carrying out household responsibilities and married again very often to much younger women.

Secondly, the process of intervention and some of the reparation mechanisms unintentionally perpetuated gendered inequities:

- The ex-gratia payments made as compensation for losses suffered in the disaster provided ready cash and was used for dowry and marriage expense.
- The incentive of a permanent home promised to newly married couples by the government proved to be a catalyst leading to mass marriages in areas like Nagapattinam.
- Similarly a verbal order by the Collector (which was later withdrawn) stating that financial assistance would be provided to the survivors, who had planned their marriages before the Tsunami led to a rash of marriages in the concerned district.

The pressure on men and women including adolescent girls and boys to get married has its roots in strictly defined gender roles. The stereotyped assigning of parenting and other household responsibilities to women, excludes men from sharing household work and childcare with women in the family. The heavy death toll of women in the Tsunami resulted in many of the Tsunami marriages. Interventions by the Government were not examined through a gender lens for unintended consequences and unwittingly helped perpetuate these imbalances.

There was also social pressure on widowers to remarry, forcing even those who did not want to remarry or needed time to grieve. As Selvam from Cuddalore district lamented, *“Lots of people have asked me to marry again... but how can I? I have not got over the*





tragedy... she died in front of my own eyes; her eyes still haunt me. There is no meaning in my life now."

In some cases, while men themselves did not remarry, they married off their young daughters instead to be free of the responsibility of taking care of them. Some men, however, did not get married for fear that the stepmother may ill-treat the children. Some others felt that remarriage may affect the children psychologically as they might not be able to adjust to a new relationship. Yet another reason cited by men against remarriage was the age of their children, especially where the children were adolescents or adults.

b) New 'reproductive' roles for (some) men

The Tsunami has highlighted the necessity for sensitizing men to participate in home care activities which build better capacities to face calamities, including habits of saving which is traditionally assigned to women.

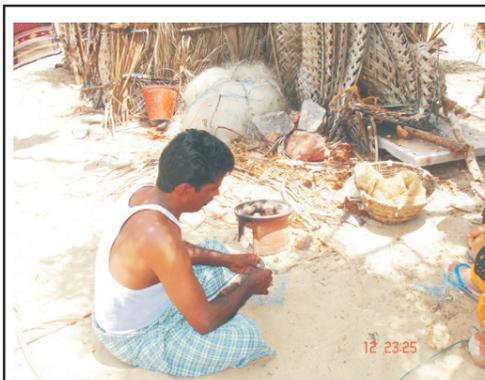
In the *Irula* community, traditional gender roles allows women and men to share most of the household work including cooking, washing, and fetching water and firewood. Post-Tsunami men in the *Irula* community in Indira Nagar, Cuddalore district for example, reduced expenses on drinking to channel the money for the education of their children.

Focus group discussions with women emphasized the need for programs that focus on men in order to benefit women. For example, some pointed out the need to place more emphasis on forming men's SHGs so that women alone do not have to bear the burden of acquiring and managing loans. A majority of women suggested that the problem of alcohol addiction need to be taken up seriously at a political level because it affects their physical, sexual and mental health, results in loss of workdays, creates trauma for the children as well as the elderly and above all undermines the dignity of their existence as human beings. An overwhelming majority of women



across districts pointed out that a weak political will was responsible for government's inability to take action against sale of alcohol. Many women stressed that this money on alcohol could be used for increasing food security, expenses on children's education, improved clothing, and repair of houses. According to these women tackling alcohol consumption was the most important challenge that would help them escape the debt trap.

Significantly, men who took care for their children reported a reduction in or abstinence from alcohol consumption. Some men even migrated to places near their children's school. In such cases, men began learning how to carry out new "reproductive" roles. They



Naguran of Samiarpet, Cuddalore district, father of two girls and a boy, lost his wife to the Tsunami but did not remarry. Post-Tsunami, he has learnt the hard way, the important role a woman plays at home. He brings ration and groceries and helps his daughter in the kitchen, when at home. In case his children are sick, he attends to them. He has come to realize now

what never crossed his mind before: it is nonstop hard work for women and not just 'sitting at home' (as the common expression goes). He has cut down the time he spends at sea so as to be with his children. This means that he does not stay for more than a day at sea. To compensate for the loss of income, he has taken up fish vending, which is primarily seen as a woman's job. Also, his son, aged 15, has dropped out of school to go to sea as Naguran, burdened with double roles, is not able to earn enough.

assumed the role of primary care givers in the household, bringing rations and vegetables, helping the daughters in the kitchen, taking the children to the hospital and taking care of them when they fell sick.

An analysis of the coping strategies in the context of a disaster bring into focus two important factors. First, the separation of





'productive' and 'reproductive' roles of men and women mirrored in government programs and policies has aggravated the poverty of the households by an increase in alcohol consumption and domestic violence. Second, seen from a gender perspective, rebuilding livelihood requires not only income but also meeting livelihood needs through sustainable expenditure (PEACE, 2004).

Violence against Women

The economic and psychosocial stresses of the Tsunami, coupled with changes in men's livelihood and productive roles, have coincided with increased reports of violence against women. Women highlighted several factors that, in their view, contributed to increased violence within the home. Alcohol consumption was reported as one of the significant causes, if not the only cause, of deepening debts, increased work burden on women, and escalating conflicts within the home and community.

Lack of privacy in temporary shelters also contributed to violence against women. Lack of privacy did not just mean lack of separate spaces for adults and children. The shelters were placed closely adjacent to each other with no spaces between them. Consequently the walls literally had ears, making the inhabitants feel they were living in an open street. No activity could be conducted in privacy and every sound- rustling of clothes being changed, conversations and quarrels, clatter of vessels during mealtimes and sounds of love making were all audible to the neighbors. Due to this extreme lack of privacy going about daily life's activities became an ordeal. It was reported that children and the elderly never slept sound due to heat and insect bites. Despite this lack of privacy, men continued making sexual demands on their wives. As reported by most women in FGDs, having to yield to their husbands' sexual demands, under such conditions was enormously distressing. In addition, the overburden of both productive and reproductive activities on women and consequent physical fatigue led to a lessening of their sexual desire. This was cited as one of the core reasons for increased



domestic violence. Failure to give in very often resulted in physical and verbal abuse and in many cases increased consumption of alcohol by the men.

The Domestic Violence Act, 2005, states that early and forced marriages are another expression of domestic violence. This form of violence was common post-Tsunami. Political disempowerment of women and girls and silencing of their voices through the imposition of fine and threat of social exclusion from the community by the traditional *Panchayats* were also other forms of violence against women, which came into focus during FGDs.

Exclusion from political participation

Women's participation in public decision-making processes is a value in itself and may be instrumental in furthering pro-women and pro-poor policies. However, in most of the communities covered during field research, women have been systemically excluded from political participation at the local level. This observation held true across *Dalit* and fishing communities, with the exception of the *Irula* communities and a few villages where women enjoyed relatively greater representation in the local *Panchayats* or parish councils. One of the main reasons cited by women for their deteriorating condition, post-Tsunami, is their exclusion in matters of distribution of relief goods and rehabilitation assets, especially in the fishing community.

Although women in general remained largely excluded from decision making bodies, women who were young, widowed, unmarried, childless, those not heading households, those with only girls, the elderly, and the destitute faced the most severe forms of exclusion. These vulnerable groups suffered in terms of access to relief, rehabilitation, and reconstruction entitlements. While such vulnerabilities existed pre-Tsunami, gender-based disadvantages have been mediated and reinforced by gender-blind and gender-neutral policies and interventions in the Tsunami relief and rehabilitation process. The result has been hunger and deprivation, and the denial of entitlements in relief, housing, and old-age pensions.





Conclusion

Through extensive field work in the Tsunami struck districts of Tamil Nadu, this chapter has brought into focus several gender issues that emerged in the aftermath of the disaster. Focus group discussions, and in-depth personal interviews identified how deeply entrenched and how widely dispersed are the attitudes, beliefs and practices that perpetuate gender inequalities and how these influenced both the impact as well as its redress.

Tsunami survival rates and loss assessment showed how in district after district more women died than men and among survivors women's losses suffered more invisibility than that of men. The reparation measures too were disadvantageously skewed for women. This was clearly visible in the differential access to resources such as shelters, health services, employment and ex-gratia payments.

Then again the Tsunami presented an opportunity, an entry point for action, to integrate gender concerns in disaster response. Disaster as an opportunity is exemplified by the Irula experience. Today the Irulas call it a 'Golden Tsunami' "but for the churning of nature" they say 'the churning of social norms, granting them greater visibility and acceptance would never have occurred. Similarly many women and adolescent girls across communities have broken the mold and become vocal about their need and aspirations following the Tsunami. They have gained the capacity to reflect on the gender bias inherent in social norms and institutions, for instance the structure of male dominated traditional panchayat. The fact that women have seen the positive changes that policy interventions can make in their own lives permits the possibility of a bottom up mobilization for gender mainstreaming.

The strategies for making the gender dimension visible in any planned action such as programs and policies will be dealt with in detail in the next chapter. In addition the next chapter discusses gender mainstreaming strategies adopted by various N.G.O.s in the three districts covered during field research.



End Notes

¹ *It was reported that in some areas the waves were so powerful that even strong swimmers were helpless.*

² *Length of cloth, of at least six yards, draped round the body, worn as the main garment by women.*

³ *Many women reported that it was difficult for them to run fast carrying their children in their arms or holding them by their hands.*

⁴ *Women's innerwear, generally includes petticoats—undergarment worn from the waist to the ankle—and brassieres, and in addition panties for adolescent girls.*

⁵ *Focused group discussion with women and discussion with CARE Trust.*

⁶ *The Irulas, a semi-nomadic tribe, are an indigenous people, spread over a vast area of northern Tamil Nadu and Southern Andhra Pradesh. They were hunter-gatherers depending on forest produce for their survival and sustenance. Today, the Irulas typically live in small groups on the outskirts of villages. The Irula diet includes herbs, tubers, rats, termites, mongoose, turtles and monitor lizards.*

⁷ *Adolescent girls and women reported high level of anxiety, frequent abdominal pain, and constipation in Silladi Nagar, Nagapattinam district. Eco-san toilets were constructed in some areas visited. These could be attributed directly to their reluctance to use the eco san toilets, constructed as part of relief operations following the Tsunami. The toilets were poorly designed and the toilet pits became breeding grounds for insects. The insect bites caused rashes and severe itching in the vaginal areas of women and children. Finally the women and children abandoned the use of these toilets and took recourse to defecating in the open.*

⁸ *Although the Government Order (G.O.Ms.No.172 dated 30-3-2005) related to the ownership of housing stipulates that after the demise of the parents the property would be inherited by the eldest child along with the survivor, many fear that it will not happen in practice due to socio-cultural norms to which many women surrender. House ownership, in such cases, will be with the male child.*

⁹ *A cent is approximately 480 sq.ft. of land.*



¹⁰ *A pucca house is one that is generally made of bricks, stones, cement, concrete etc. It is sturdier and more substantial than mud houses with thatched roofs. The word Pucca generally means more solid or stable.*

¹¹ *Ex-gratia is a lump sum of money, given by the government at its discretion as compensation to the injured or to the kin of those who lost their lives in a calamity: natural or human made. It is not an interest free loan and is completely free of any conditionalities*

¹² *G.O. Ms. No. 6, dated 8-1-2005, which specifies that money should be spent on self-employment/education of adolescent girls below the age of 18 and unmarried women above 18 years of age is transformatory in nature, as it transfers agency to girls by addressing their strategic needs for higher education and initiating their own business self employment. It is heartening to note that it does not stipulate the use of money for marriage.*

¹³ *The concept of secondary poverty refers to the fact that men do not generally allocate their entire income to meet the livelihood needs of the household. Secondary poverty is as significant as poverty per se for women. Sometimes poverty itself is a result of secondary poverty as households become impoverished when men spend part of their income on alcohol and gambling. This is not to deny that secondary poverty is also caused by practices such as dowry.*

¹⁴ *Discussion with the Gender Coordinator, SNEHA, Nagapattinam*

¹⁵ *In villages women prefer to use firewood and fuel cakes rather than stoves and kerosene. Many were cooking in and outside the temporary shelters with firewood — stoves remained unused.*

¹⁶ *Men in India rarely opt for vasectomy due largely to a falsely held belief that this would diminish their vigor and “manhood.” It is also believed by both women and men that vasectomy would make men physically weak.*

¹⁷ *Discussion with SNEHA and referencing the data base at SNEHA in October, 2006.*

¹⁸ *Discussion with women in Nambiar Nagar, Nagapattinam, in October 2006.*



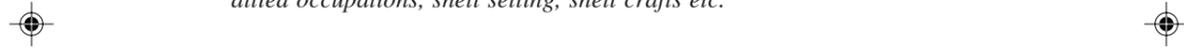


¹⁹ *Women are apprehensive about re-marriage as they fear that they would have to bear the burden of not only their own children but also the children of the second husband. There may be pressure to bear his children, which may result in discrimination against her own children especially if she/they happen to be girls.*

²⁰ *G.O. (Ms) No.199, dated 21.12.2006 stipulates, enumeration of Aravani population and measures to improve their status. It recognizes their fundamental rights. Since then a welfare board for Aravanis has been constituted by the State government to look after the welfare of Aravanis. However, the manner in which the identity of the aravanis has been defined in the Government Order, does not fully acknowledge their realities and remains an area of contention.*

²¹ *In Silladi Nagar, Nagapattinam district (Source: Balwadi Workers).*

²² *These include Kesavapallyam, Chandrapadi, Jeeva Nagar, Cooksnagar in Nagapattinam district and Panchkuppam, Kodimaratheru, Madhakoil Street, Sivanarpuram in Cuddalore district. No data was available from Kanyakumari district, possibly because the main sources of livelihoods were fishing and allied occupations, shell selling, shell crafts etc.*







III

NGOs' Gender Mainstreaming Strategies An Analysis

The multiple implications of socially constructed gender stereotypes for disaster recovery were clearly evident in the Tsunami aftermath. This chapter attempts to profile strategies adopted by NGOs for mainstreaming gender within their relief, rehabilitation, and reconstruction agendas. The emphasis is on examining the implementation of policies and programs with a gender focus. Both tangible and intangible gains along with unintended positive and negative impacts have been explored. The analysis is based on qualitative information gathered from the field, interviews with the NGO heads, available organizational documents, and Internet sources.

The gender mainstreaming framework developed by Rao and Kelleher has been adapted to analyze gender mainstreaming strategies of the selected NGOs. The framework proposes three approaches to gender mainstreaming, namely the creation of gender infrastructure, organizational change and institutional change.

- **Gender infrastructure** refers to the basic systems integral to an organization that are required for gender mainstreaming such as the organizational gender policy, gender planning systems, gender indicators for monitoring, gender-sensitive recruitment, quotas for women in leadership, and mechanisms facilitating non-stereotypical roles for women and men. This study expands the gender dimension by addressing issues of gender infrastructure in relation to the needs of the *Aravanis*.





- **Organizational change** for gender mainstreaming consists of modifications to internal processes such as promoting a gender-aware organizational culture, creating ‘pressure’ groups among women staff, and building alliances with the broader women’s movement.
- **Institutional change** for gender mainstreaming focuses on attempts to bring about structural changes in institutions like the household, markets, community, and the state through the implementation of policies, programs and activities.

The NGOs that were part of the field research have not formally adopted any particular model of gender mainstreaming. Different aspects of organizational change and the creation of gender infrastructure have been analyzed to the extent that the participating NGOs made such information available. An effort has been made to understand the extent to which the policies and programs of the NGOs promote institutional change by addressing the strategic gender needs (SGNs) and practical gender needs (PGNs) of women, men, and *Aravanis*.

Gender infrastructure and organizational approaches to gender

The NGOs in the study varied in their understanding of gender. All NGOs were aware of women’s subordinate position in society. However, of the eleven NGOs covered during the field research, only two had an implicit understanding of gender as socially constructed differences between men and women. While some organizations were of the view that bringing about change in gender relations was a slow process, others felt that the Tsunami disaster, which set gender roles in a flux, presented an opportunity to bring about rapid and profound changes in women’s position and condition.

Most NGOs understood women’s empowerment in terms of creating income-generation opportunities for women. About 6 of





the 11 participating NGOs, viewed women's empowerment in terms of achieving an equal power relationship between women and men. Significantly, all the participating organizations had an understanding that gender roles and relations are context specific and changeable.

In the course of their relief operations, organizations had focused on addressing the PGNs of women. Programs of seven NGOs reflected an emphasis on SGNs, by addressing power relations between men and women. Of these seven organizations relations four were working with men to sensitize them on gender issues. However, none of the organizations had directed their interventions to integrate the gender concerns of the *Aravanis*.

a) *Gender in vision, mission, and objectives*

An analysis of the vision, mission statements, and objectives of the participating organizations revealed that most NGOs recognized that women and girls belonging to the marginalized groups such as *Dalits* and *Irulas* were doubly disadvantaged and vulnerable because of their caste and ethnic identities. The term 'gender' was not used explicitly by most organizations, nor did they employ gender policies or planning frameworks. Most of them did not prepare gender responsive budgets or use gender specific indicators in their programs. Gender-integrated job descriptions and performance appraisal systems did not exist in most organizations.

In some organizations an understanding of Gender issues was clearly articulated in their Vision and Mission statements. Considerable investment had been made on gender training by these NGOs before the Tsunami, and in some cases post-Tsunami, leading to gender-aware strategies. The fact that most of the leaders were committed to gender issues had helped these organizations in shaping their programs and implementation strategies.





b) *Gender in Policies and Practice*

Though a majority of NGOs had a Tsunami program plan, they did not have a clearly articulated gender policy or plan. Women's SGNs were reflected in the program design and implementation of six of the participating NGOs.

Only one of the participating organizations had the position of a post of a gender coordinator whose responsibility was to ensure that gender concerns were integrated across programs. As a result there was a conscious effort to analyze the implications of various interventions on the daily lives of women. This organization had included livelihood, housing, and childcare programs based on an understanding of the inter links between various needs of women, including the need for mobility.

It was evident that in several organizations there was a need to strengthen skills of gender analysis to better understand the lived experiences of vulnerable women, men, and *Aravanis*. Such an analysis helps understand the intended and unintended impact of work burden, opportunity costs, and domestic violence on women. It could also help gauge the impact of policies and programs on behavior and gender needs of men, as well as encourage men to look beyond their traditional 'productive' roles to consider nontraditional 'reproductive' roles such as childcare and household management.

c) *Gender mainstreaming in recruitment and staffing*

Most of the NGOs covered during the research had achieved gender parity in staffing patterns. In some organizations, however, women outnumbered men. It was evident that innovative and gender-sensitive practices were being adopted for recruitment and promotion among many of the NGOs. Recognizing the value and importance of the lived experiences of women, some organizations had relaxed the basic qualification





for women vis-a-vis men for the same position. Nonetheless, most of the organizations did not have women in managerial or decision making positions. Moreover, it was apparent that women's strategic role in program design and implementation was limited.

There were several innovative practices adopted by participating NGOs that emerged during field research. A gender-equity framework informed the employment criteria in SNEHA. The lived experience of women was given due weightage, in absence of any work experience. Similarly, women with a formal Higher Secondary qualification were given the same opportunities as men with a Graduation degree. As a result, men with higher qualifications were working under women with lesser formal qualification than them. SNEHA, in its prospective staff, looked for people with the capacity to analyze a specific context at ground level from a gender perspective rather than just theoretical education. SNEHA has a specific test for the assessment of these skills. The organization also helped girls who were not able to continue their education by bearing half the cost of their higher education. SNEHA has made a conscious decision to keep a men:women staff ratio of 60:45.

Another organization, PURA, hired a Muslim woman activist from another organization, STEP—an association working for the rights of Muslim women, tapping in to this expertise pool helped PURA organize Muslim women, who traditionally remained within the confines of their homes to form self-help groups (SHGs) as well as to build gender awareness among Muslim women at the grassroots level. For the first time, Muslim women in *Pillaihopu*, *Kanyakumari* district, came together to discuss issues of common concern that affect their lives. The women reported that traveling outside their homes and their villages (with their husbands' permission) was both a positive change and a liberating





experience. These changes were made possible because of the confidence that PURA's staff was able to build in both women and men of the community.

d) *Capacity building, awareness generation, and empowerment of local staff*

The strategic and conscious decision of almost all participating organizations to recruit women from the affected communities contributed significantly to the upward mobility of women. Their confidence and self esteem increased by working outside their homes, leading to a change in self-image. In addition, paid work provided sustenance to their families in time of scarcity and hardship. Members of EKTA, FPAI, and PRAXIS in Cuddalore and Kanyakumari districts, revealed that young women employed by the NGOs started carrying handbags¹ and traveling alone. Over time the initial resistance from the community too reduced. The handbag became a symbol of work and self respect rather than symbol of a 'bad woman.' Self awareness of their own strengths and capacities increased among many young girls and they have come to know the joy of being independent. There is also a growing consciousness of the significance of their own as well as that of their mothers' contribution to the family, in terms of both monetary and non monetary activities.

e) *Organizational change for gender mainstreaming*

Periodic gender-sensitive organizational development processes have been initiated in two of the participating organizations. These participatory sessions have helped in reflecting on the gains and challenges in mainstreaming gender in various institutions, i.e., family, community, and market. Other organizations are in the process of developing a gender policy. But how many of these organizations will actually carry forward these policies within the context of their internal organizational development process remains to be seen.





f) *Gender mainstreaming in training and awareness building*

Most organizations considered training an effective means for building and strengthening awareness on gender issues. The staff of a number of NGOs including EKTA, SNEHA, PURA, PRAXIS, SASY, and CARE Trust, have been regular participants in training sessions on gender, reproductive health, and women's human rights issues.

FPAI staff has had extensive training in sexual and reproductive health and rights, and hence have acquired a fundamental understanding of gender and gender equality. The training included involving men in health concerns of women and vice versa. In turn the NGO staff have taken these trainings forward and disseminated them at the village level through meetings, street plays, and audio-visual media.

Transforming institutions

At the level of program design and implementation² the NGOs surveyed in the research adopted different gender mainstreaming strategies to meet both the PGNs and SGNs of women in disaster recovery. At the household level, NGOs were gender-sensitive in their aid delivery and sought to expand women's ownership of assets as well as to increase girls' access to education. NGO interventions have, in a number of instances, challenged the gender division of labor, the low valuation of women's work, unequal access to markets vis-a-vis men and women's low leverage in bargaining in the market place.

At the community level, the norms of male leadership and representation of male interests within the traditional *Panchayats* have been challenged to some extent. Gendered segregation of public spaces, workplace, household gender roles and male alcoholism have been questioned and challenged through NGO efforts.





a) *Gender-sensitive relief distribution : Strategies*

NGOs played a key role in the distribution of immediate relief. Majority of the NGOs attempted to address the sex- and gender-differentiated needs of women in different ways. These included both direct and indirect distribution of relief through SHGs, *Balwadis* or through women's federations.

These strategies were inclusive of the needs of the most marginalized groups of women and men such as single women, unmarried women not heading households, disabled women and men, and the elderly.

Addressing sex- and gender-differentiated needs in relief distribution

A number of NGOs carried out gender-sensitive needs assessment and designed their relief efforts accordingly. Where the needs of women and girls were taken into account, the content of immediate relief packages reflected gender differentiated practical needs. Most participating NGOs distributed sanitary towels to adolescent girls and women, as well as delivered gender and age-appropriate clothing. Other examples include :

- FPAI, from the initial stage of the Tsunami response, intervened to meet the sanitary and reproductive health needs of women and men. Apart from sanitary napkins and emergency contraceptives for women, FPAI distributed condoms to men on a large scale.
- PURA and PEDDA also realized that inner-garments distributed by the Government did not include brassieres, creating discomfort for women and adolescent girls. They networked with other support organizations and got the necessary supply of innerwear.





- PURA also networked with other support NGOs to pool resources for relief distribution, highlighting the importance of collaborative efforts in channeling gender-sensitive relief.
- PRAXIS provided cooking facilities, repaired the toilets, and distributed undergarments to affected women. It organized cleaning of villages and houses to reduce the work burden on women.

Meeting PGNs of specific target groups

All the NGOs emphasized women in their relief, rehabilitation, and reconstruction programs, demonstrating their understanding that women are more disadvantaged than men in accessing resources and benefits in crisis situations. In addition, some NGOs also focused on specific vulnerable groups of women. Single women and their gender-based disadvantages drew the attention of almost all the participating organizations.

- SASY distributed an additional 60 kilograms of rice to widows and unmarried women not heading households, elderly women living with their children and destitute women (across castes and religious groups) to ensure that in times of scarcity they were not considered a burden by their family members or community.
- CARE Trust and PRAXIS adopted a similar approach to reach out to those excluded from relief channeled through the mainstream institutions. Given their limited resources, both organizations opted to focus on the needs of less visible sections of the affected population such as widows, children, the disabled, and the elderly.





- PRAXIS took special care to meet the needs of malnourished children, lactating mothers, and pregnant women.
- CARE Trust distributed relief to target groups excluded in the wider distribution of aid such as inland fishing folk, seashell collectors, and landless *Dalits* in the coastal region. These categories of people were among the most neglected in the relief distribution carried out by NGOs, the government and other mainstream institutions.
- CARE Trust's initial survey helped identify these groups and guided their distribution choices. It placed special emphasis on single women, chronically sick women and men, the disabled and women who were dependent on their children or the village community.

Focus on institutional changes through program initiatives

a) *Institutional changes through relief distribution*

Relief distribution which normally resists gender sensitivity on the grounds of exigency can really become a context for creating spaces for women in different areas: social, political, and psychological. What is needed is political will and a readiness to institutionalize gender concerns in this immediate phase of disaster response.

When NGOs consciously decided to shift from distributing relief through traditional Panchayats comprising exclusively of men to distributing it through women's collectives, they effected a strategic intervention that provided women an opportunity to reflect on their position in the political structure of their community and thwart it with the twin strategies of resistance



and co-operation. Resistance consisted of staking claim to substantial participation in decision making powers by the women, which was unprecedented prior to the disaster, and the co-operation consisted of extending just enough recognition to the traditional Panchayat, to prevent a violent and total rejection of women's initiative backed by NGOs .

For example, SNEHA was firm that relief would be channeled through its federation and extended its support to the Sangams³ (women's groups) who were negotiating resistance from the traditional Panchayats. This was converted into a strategic opportunity for institutionalizing women's groups in disaster preparedness. SNEHA's federation had

Steps of Relief Distribution :

- Conducted a comprehensive needs analysis through Women's Federations.
- A beneficiary list was prepared by the Federations.
- The Federations obtained quotations for the supplies from several vendors.
- Quotations were compared for pricing and quality.
- Purchases were made on a bulk basis.
- Supplies were packed by the Federation members who were paid daily wages.
- Each village prepared a comprehensive list of families.
- The Federations resisted the demands of the Traditional Panchayat for the right to distribute.
- Skillful negotiations lead to Traditional Panchayat agreeing to distribution by Federations.
- Federations organized load vehicles for transporting the supplies.
- Tokens were issued to rights-holders.
- Traditional Panchayat leaders invited by Federation to be present at the distribution phase.
- Relief supplies were distributed.
- The Federations rechecked to make sure nobody was excluded.

The efficient logistics, handled by women was an exercise in organization and strategy development that was far more than mere extension of women's domestic role often seen in community services such as cleaning the surroundings or distributing relief to women alone.



conducted a prompt survey and had developed gender-disaggregated database to confirm the list prepared by the traditional *Panchayats*. In the process, the federations were quickly able to spot the excluded women and men. The gender-disaggregated survey made it possible to procure age and gender-appropriate clothing and other sanitary items for each household in the community. The entire process went through several stages of swift coordination. Distribution was then made according to family size, thus setting a precedent that established that it is possible to formulate an emergency response that is prompt, equitable and gender sensitive.

Examples of channeling relief through alternative and women-friendly channels

When some NGOs, for example PEDA, BLESS and SASY, took the bold step of distributing the relief directly, or through women's SHGs, bypassing the powerful traditional *Panchayats*, it had a major impact on the

From our FGDs with both women and men, it has emerged that when relief is mediated through women's groups it is more inclusive of the needs of both women and men and less susceptible to corrupt influences. It is empathetic to the needs especially of destitute and deserted women and women with disabled spouses. In SASY's case, the women's group in Kodimarthatheru guided the organization in direct distribution of relief not only to the Dalit communities but also to Muslims, and those belonging to other castes so as to preserve the pre-Tsunami harmony among different caste, occupational, and religious groups.

consciousness of women. For the first time women realized that they have the right to equal access to relief and can demand relief supplies that meet their sex and gender-specific needs. Though relief is generally viewed as an apolitical emergency measure to help people survive, the political decision to distribute it directly or through SHGs empowered many women. Some of the women who had assumed leadership positions in the relief





distribution process are thinking beyond the immediate context to the long-term impact of their decision making power, on their and their children's lives.

b) Facilitating access to entitlements

NGOs played an instrumental role in helping vulnerable women to access public entitlements such as pensions and ration cards. EKTA, for example, helped identify those who were eligible but did not have access to government schemes. The field staff coordinated with concerned officials to help both women and men through the necessary application procedures and follow-up. A program coordinator also helped investigate legalities when they suspected that an individual or group's right to benefits were being violated or infringed. For example, lobbying and advocacy by EKTA challenged the gender bias within the pension scheme for widows. EKTA's strategy also gave much-needed support to people who previously had given up efforts to access their entitlements. EKTA filled an important gap by making the community aware of their rights and entitlements. SASY and CARE Trust made available legal assistance to access entitlements such as ex-gratia and housing for *Irula* women and single women.

c) Challenging patriarchal norms: focus on single women and their daughters

A number of organizations targeted children's needs during the Tsunami response. EKTA highlighted the needs of the girl child, especially daughters of single women. Recognizing that girls were most likely to be the first ones to drop out of school, EKTA implemented a well thought out long-term strategy to retain girls in school (for 3 years) by providing them educational and teaching / learning materials. This initiative helped in





reducing the economic burden on single women. It was a conscious but difficult decision for the organization to target only girls, as many boys were left out in the process. Nevertheless, where a choice had to be made, EKTA took affirmative action in favor of daughters of single women. In case of surplus funds, EKTA decided to assist daughters of other poor and vulnerable women.

EKTA linked its educational program with reproductive health. The group focused on regular health check ups by a woman doctor and maintained a health card for each child to record their health and ensure follow up. The teaching learning materials were distributed to only those who were regular in their check ups. This conditionality made health check ups a success as mothers were required to accompany their daughters. A visit to the doctor also oriented the mothers to the health status of their daughters. Mothers began taking their girls for regular health check ups, i.e., twice a year, and were also regular in the follow-up.

Many single women admitted that but for this gender-focused intervention, they would not have been able to afford the school expenses of their daughters. Earlier it was usual for girls to drop out because of poverty and/or increasing work burden. EKTA's women staff members maintained regular communication with mothers and motivated them to encourage their girls to attend school regularly.

A focus on adolescent girls

SNEHA focused attention on the needs of adolescent girls. Following the Tsunami, SNEHA collected and analyzed field data, which indicated high levels of depression, suicidal tendencies, feelings of loneliness, a need for sharing and being guided, and low awareness levels regarding reproductive health issues among





adolescent girls. In response, SNEHA formed groups of adolescent girls to help orient them and raise awareness on issues related to alcoholism, children's rights, and hazards of early marriages as well as reproductive health concerns. Prior to the formation of these groups, it was considered taboo to discuss sexual and reproductive health issues.

d) *Gender-aware change in rules, norms, and resource allocation within institutions*

The participating NGOs have demonstrated the ability to bring gender-aware change in rules, norms, and resource allocation of all institutions—households, communities, markets, and State.

Challenging gender division of labor in labor and service markets and strengthening livelihood of women

Attempts have been made by several NGOs to impart nontraditional productive skills to women leading to both direct and indirect effects on gender relations in labor and service markets and in meeting both their practical gender needs and strategic interests. For example, HOPE made special efforts to meet the strategic interests of women by equipping them with nontraditional skills.

In Tranquebar, HOPE provided masonry training to 60 women from both fishing and nonfishing communities previously engaged in head loading (carrying mud and bricks)

The adolescent girls' group belonging to SNEHA's project in Seruthur, Nagai, successfully exerted pressure on parents and prevented early marriages of group members. Discussions on why women's reproductive health suffered, led them to question why they should eat last and least. Consequently they began eating whenever they felt hungry, without waiting for the male members to finish their meals, which was the norm in most households. Other family members too accepted this practice. The group meetings also provided the girls a forum where they could share their concerns with the staff of SNEHA and learn to better manage their anxieties and emotional problems.





Pushpa, aged 35, is engaged in a housing project of an NGO in Tranquebar, Nagai. She has been trained in masonry by HOPE and is now refining her skills with the help of a master mason. For her it is a significant experience. She says, "I could have never imagined that I would be recognized as a mason and be paid Rs.150 (approximate USD3.75) as daily wage, double the amount I used to



get as a construction /agricultural worker." Together with her husband's earnings, she has been able to pay off her debts. She is confident that she can now employ four persons to work under her. She feels that today men take her seriously and are more supportive, although she gets Rs.50(USD1.25) lesser than them because she is unable to lay the roof. However, she is not convinced that women masons cannot lay roofs and is confident that they can do so with a bit of practice. She also laughs away the difference between men and women masons as merely men's strategy to keep themselves a bit above women. She is now more confident at home and feels that handling a mason's tools has earned her greater respect in the eyes of her husband and children.

at construction sites. Subsequently, 75 percent of the women participating in the program became engaged in construction work (some worked for a housing project of an NGO, which hired women masons, trained by HOPE). They received daily wages that were twice as high as what they used to receive as head loaders, i.e., Rs.150 (USD3.75) per day pre-Tsunami.

Although wage differences between women and men persist, the gains to women masons cannot be denied. As a result of the training they received, women strengthened their basic literacy and arithmetic skills necessary for masonry. Women were proud that they were now measuring the walls and laying and plastering bricks. Handling a mason's tool became a symbol of empowerment for these women. Men, however, defended the gender gap in wages by stating that women were inexperienced and that they did not have the capacity to lay roofs.



A large majority of girls are enrolled in all the non traditional courses offered by HOPE. Many of them have opted for courses such as mobile phone servicing and spoken English to improve their employment opportunities. In addition to vocational training HOPE established linkages with recruitment agencies and other NGOs, to help students to get better jobs. Five girls trained in these programs took up employment in Chennai and towns closer to Nagapattinam. Three women students, who completed computer courses offered by HOPE, were employed by an NGO in Nagai and were drawing an income of Rs.3,000 (approximate USD75) per month.

Another organization, BLESS, helped women to venture into nontraditional income-generating activities. For example, a women's SHG in Old Town, Cuddalore, established a courier service with assistance from BLESS. Embarking on such an enterprise required extraordinary leadership qualities, resourcefulness, organized group efforts, a good business plan, developing new skills such as riding bicycles and bikes, as well as support from men. The women in the SHGs built up an enabling business environment by obtaining a certificate of recognition from the District Collector. They also established links with institutions such as banks and government offices and mobilized favorable public opinion.

Men (including the husbands of group members) supported the initiative by teaching women to cycle and ride motorbikes. They accepted the enhanced mobility of women and their need to come home late from work in the evening. Group members reported that relationships between husbands and wives improved in terms of mutual respect and recognition of each other's worth. The 20 women in this SHG have been traveling throughout Cuddalore district, making their mark in public spaces.





BLESS also trained women in the repair and maintenance of hand pumps. Women often faced inconvenience due to dysfunctional hand pumps and were dependent on their husbands or male mechanics for repairs. The training not only enhanced women's self-esteem but handling tools traditionally meant for men helped them to challenge occupational stereotypes. It also helped change the perceptions of men, women and children in the community concerning what women can do.

Institutionalizing equal pay for equal work

In most parts of Tamil Nadu women traditionally draw lower wages than men for work of equal value. This has always been justified by gender division of tasks and false claims that tasks performed by men were more difficult than those performed by women or that the productivity of men was more than women for same jobs. Post-Tsunami all organizations (except one) institutionalized the norm of equal wages for women and men in their housing construction as well as cash for work programs. However, the challenge is to sustain this practice through powerful advocacy and lobbying efforts within the private sector.

Challenging gender norms regarding ownership of houses

Most houses in Tamil Nadu are traditionally owned by men, women headed households being the exception to this rule. The participating NGOs who have taken up housing construction have given joint ownership to women and men. It is a process of empowering women through meeting their SGN of having ownership and of joint control over housing.

SNEHA's strategy of rebuilding *in situ* houses through community participation had a positive impact on both women and men. Cash was transferred in the name of women on installment basis

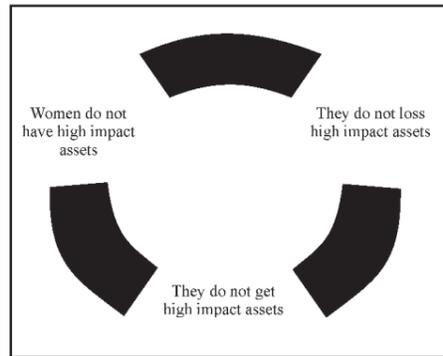




and close monitoring ensured that money was strictly spent on house construction. Focus group discussions with women and men revealed that men not only reduced drinking to channel more money in rebuilding their houses but it was also the first time that women had bank accounts in their names. The housing design and construction was carried out through a collective decision to involve masons from outside as the community did not have trained men and women masons. An unintended, positive impact of SNEHA's intervention was that there emerged a need for masonry training in the community. Both women and men realized the importance of having skilled masons to ensure cost effectiveness and better employment opportunities with higher wages in the construction sector.

Challenging gender norms regarding ownership of productive assets

Women generally do not possess high-value assets; hence, they do not lose high value assets in a disaster. The status quo approach creates a vicious circle. SNEHA and BLESS have broken out of this status quo approach for reconstruction.



Challenging the norms of ownership of high-value assets and popular perception of Micro-credit

Given high levels of pre-Tsunami debt, women benefited from SNEHA's initial seed capital in the form of a grant. SNEHA's seed money Rs.3,000 (approximate USD75) for fisherwomen provided them with an initial impetus when they needed it most. Many had nothing else with which to restart their business. Some of





them used the money to start selling fish; others used it to replace assets and tools of trade, which they lost in the Tsunami.

In addition to providing grants to individual fisher women, SNEHA also provided three fisherwomen's federations with an auto rickshaw (three wheeler) each to relieve their burden of head loading and increase their mobility. Not only did the carrier autos lead to the decrease in the commuting time of women, it also led to a substantial decrease in their head load. Earlier they walked 10 km per day or faced harassment in buses. The auto carrier helped in ensuring their dignity and increased their sense of security. The women own and use the auto collectively, although they all get off to vend at different places. Asset ownership led to strengthening the institutional capacities of the federation. The federation at the time of the field research was ready to buy another auto in view of the increased demand, as well as the sustainable income it ensured to the federation.

SNEHA also gave a stock of vessels to all the *taluk*⁴ level fisher women's federations. The federations rent out the vessels which fetch them a good income. This venture was both profitable and sustainable, as the federations reinvested the profit in buying more vessels.

In another such initiative, BLESS empowered women's SHGs in the *Irula* community. It provided them ownership of a mini tempo⁵ and a stock of vessels for renting. The tempo is rented out on a daily basis. It was also being used to transport the vessels, thus ensuring a small profit each day.

BLESS also leased an acre of land and handed it over to a SHG in Cuddalore for cultivation of fodder. It implemented a well thought out strategy to meet both women's practical need for income generation and their strategic needs for ownership of productive assets. One SHG was engaged in the cultivation of green fodder, which became scarce, post-Tsunami, while members





of 30 SHGs received 4 goats each with insurance coverage. BLESS insisted that the repayment for goats was in kind and not in cash; with each woman member returning the four male kids to BLESS. This strategy helped gain popularity among women who did not feel the burden of cash repayment and thus did not have to incur debts to repay the money. Both ventures strengthened each other, demonstrating the importance of occupational interdependencies.

There was an increased demand for fodder not only from the SHGs who reared goats, but also from the neighboring villages. In the face of many unsuccessful post-Tsunami experiences with goat rearing, BLESS's strategy of giving four goats rather than one or two, with the assurance of continuous green fodder supply, started yielding results in terms of increased income for women.

Another NGO, PEDDA, adopted the strategy of facilitating the collective ownership of boats by women's SHGs. This approach was especially significant as most agencies had operated on a 'boat for boat' basis, giving boats only to those who had lost them during the Tsunami. Since women did not own boats before the Tsunami, they typically were not eligible to receive boats in the rehabilitation process. Women lost relatively low-value productive assets such as vessels, knives, and raw materials, which became invisible in the rehabilitation process which was guided on the false assumption that 'fishing' meant productive assets, PEDDA handed over 20 boats to 6 women's SHGs in Pudupettai. Their approach centered on promoting collaboration between spouses or between mothers and sons. Groups of four women jointly owned the boats, which were rented to the husbands or sons of other group members. Around 8 widows became owners of boats in this process. This led to their occupying an enhanced position within their homes as well as in the community. It also enhanced their worth in the eyes of the traditional *Panchayat*. Women reported that they participated more frequently in





decision making processes at the household level. Widows, who did not want to own the boats, were given Rs.20,000 (approximate USD500) in cash.

Implementing this strategy required a tough stance both from PEDDA and the women's SHGs. PEDDA made it clear that the boats would only be made available under the joint-ownership of women. The traditional *Panchayat* in Pudupettai was initially reluctant to accept this decision on the premise



Women now visit the net-mending sheds, previously exclusively male bastions, and in doing so have made their presence felt in the public domain. They have also taken up the work of preparing the nets for fishing and men at times extend help to them. The work burden on women has increased; but so has the satisfaction they gain from earning their own income. The traditional Panchayat, reportedly, has started taking the women's groups seriously.

that it would set a precedent contrary to the customary practice of only male ownership of boats in the fishing communities. The traditional *Panchayat* of Tharangambadi, a neighboring village with a much larger population, tried to pressure the *Pudupettai panchayat* to oppose PEDDA's strategy. There were fears of gender-based violence as women from Pudupettai often went to Tharangambadi for shopping and accessing healthcare facilities. But women stood their ground, arguing that if joint-ownership of boats was not accepted they would return the boats to the donor. The traditional *Panchayat* eventually accepted the decision since the *Panchayat* members felt that the husbands of the women in the SHGs would also make use of the boats.

Collaborative ventures wherein both men and women participate increased following the Tsunami with the efforts of the NGOs. For example, PURA replaced coir rope-making machines that



were destroyed in the Tsunami, with new machines in the names of women (pre-Tsunami they were in men's names). Men did not protest to this arrangement, as both men and women are engaged in the same occupation and the machines are used by the family members of SHGs. Income is divided between the workers who are mostly family members. In an effort to maintain peace and harmony within the families, men are given marginally higher wages than women.⁶

Strengthening women's collective agency

In tandem with their effort to restore and strengthen existing means of livelihoods for fisherwomen, SNEHA facilitated group activities that strengthened women's primary livelihood options. In an effort to increase their negotiating power and to make their presence felt in the domestic market, they federated women under the Tamil Nadu Women Fish Workers Forum (TNWFF). SNEHA also worked with the women in trade unions to raise awareness on their rights. For SNEHA, fish workers were not just fisherwomen engaged in fish vending and fish processing, but also others including *Dalit* women engaged in allied activities such as net making and mending and women working in fish processing companies. SNEHA also worked toward organizing women engaged in the fisheries sector to strengthen their negotiating position in the market.

Interest free credit : A mixed blessing for mainstreaming gender concerns

Both SASY and PRAXIS disbursed revolving funds, although the amount and method varied. Both organizations gave a lump sum, which could help kick-start a small business such as street vending, expanding shop premises, or increasing stocks for existing businesses. Both SASY and PRAXIS consciously focused on the most vulnerable, e.g. widows, elderly working women, the destitute, and women living with their spouses under difficult circumstances.





Revolving funds had some unintended positive impacts. In one case, a revolving fund helped to bring women together to initiate a collective venture. In another case, the revolving fund helped begin a process of reshaping gender relations, although change at the household level was limited. In one SHG, women were able to realize the potential and feasibility of collective action by pooling together loans worth Rs.10,000 (USD50) to start a business activity. But for this lumpsum cash, starting such a collective enterprise would not have been possible.

SASY left the choice of control of the money earned by the women to women themselves. Women had the

choice of either keeping the money or handing it to male members of their family. PRAXIS, in contrast, evolved a system of monitoring the use of the revolving funds by men and women. PRAXIS' revolving fund ensured a steady source of income and many recipients of loans successfully repaid their first loan and had taken a second loan.

Challenging caste- and gender-based access to markets

Dalit men and women have been traditionally excluded from fish markets. SASY sought to challenge this exclusion. Post-

Six women got together and invested Rs. 60,000 for sending boxes of processed crabs via commission agents to an export company. With self-evolved efficient division of work (cleaning, de-shelling, boiling, and packaging crabs; hiring a man to transport the boxes for daily wages), these women make a profit of Rs.165 (USD4.13) each. This collective action of women is a value in itself pointing to rich possibilities once finance is available (from the project area of SASY).

Although the venture of Health Food, a PRAXIS-supported project, does not yet have ready-market linkages, its noncash benefits have already reached the households of a few group members. The preparation of health food involves cleaning and roasting large quantity of grains. Spouses of a few members help in cleaning and roasting the grains as well as running the errands in the market. Men have started cooperating with the women in other areas too, such as taking care of the children when women are at meetings, and sometimes even cooking.



Tsunami, a group of *Dalits* living around Parangipettai, Cuddalore, made history by gaining a place in the market to run their own fish trade. Before the Tsunami, *Dalit* men worked only as wage laborers. After the Tsunami, a group of enterprising *Dalits*, with support from SASY in the form of initial capital and training, hired a space in the rebuilt market near Parangipettai to begin their business operations. In the pre-Tsunami years, this would have been unimaginable even to the *Dalits* themselves since the markets were dominated entirely by non-*Dalits* and more affluent men. A number of internal factors also made these changes possible. Several *Dalit* men who previously worked as wage laborers in the market established good contacts with local fish suppliers as well as with markets in Kerala. These linkages were mobilized to the full advantage for this business venture.

SASY also helped to facilitate women's presence in male-dominated spaces. A *Dalit* woman manages the accounts in the wholesale fish market, a task that was previously handled only by men. The Tsunami not only destroyed market facilities, but also disrupted the traditional control and dominance of powerful caste and class interests. The rebuilding of the market infrastructure provided an opportunity for both *Dalits* and women to gain an entry into the market. The openness of *Dalit* groups to include a woman in a strategic position such as financial management marked an important shift in gender roles. Although the individual qualification and capacity of the woman were crucial to her selection, her acceptance points to the fact that many more women may find a strategic position in the market in the future.

Challenging gender norms of separate community spaces for men/boys and women/girls

Gender-sensitive interventions by SNEHA, HOPE, PEDA, BLESS, and SASY opened new avenues for women/girls and men/boys to come together on common platforms.





In Nagapattinam district, PEDDA encouraged the formation of farmer groups. Though these were formed a year after the Tsunami, the impact of the disaster motivated the formation of such groups. The Tsunami exposed the vulnerability of the farmers and the livelihood they depended on. Women were encouraged to become members, and four women farmers joined these groups. Women's participation in the group was significant in a context where they are traditionally not considered farmers, despite the crucial role they play in agriculture, especially in subsistence farming. The coming together of women and men around issues of food and livelihood security, discussing their differing needs and priorities had the potential of bringing about changes in gender power relationships.

In Cuddalore district, BLESS helped form a farmers' group by involving the villages around Samiarpettai. Both women and men, of different castes and class, became members of this group. They stated that it was only after the formation of this group that women and men began coming together to discuss issues such as irrigation, choice of crops, and improved methods of farming. These issues were normally considered to be falling in the male domain. The research team witnessed women arguing and disputing male standpoint or arguing their case against male preference for cash cropping. These opportunities for women, who are 'agricultural producers and managers' of land but often excluded from decision making, gave greater visibility to women farmers as well as to the problems and solutions they perceived.

It is evident that the creation of a collaborative space, for skills training and nonformal/vocational education, involving both young women and men gave rise to a new 'culture' of gender relations. This also facilitated more equal and free interaction among women and men. For example, in Muttom village, Kanyakumari, Care Trust's computer training center provided





a space where young women and men could interact with each other. They discussed several issues including alcoholism, domestic violence, dowry, future livelihood options and emigration of men.

Similarly, programs offered by HOPE in Nagapattinam and Trunquebar provided a range of vocational courses for a large number of young women and men catering to their emerging aspirations. The courses included masonry, mobile phone assembly, computer courses, and driving. These courses cutting across gender divides, enabled women and men to acquire non-traditional skills and widened their options for future livelihood as well as helped build social networks. As these courses were affordable and professionally managed, they attracted participation from women who would not have opted for these courses due to financial constraints. It is apparent that there are several opportunities for self-employment after completion of training. Discussions pointed out that trainees helped each other to search for jobs. There were several cases where women helped their male cotrainees to find jobs for them and vice versa. A majority of the people who have undergone training maintained links and supported each other when required.

SNEHA has also promoted children's *Panchayat* meetings wherein participation of both girls and boys was elicited. Girls are overcoming their shyness, while parents have come to accept these collaborative spaces. Although adolescents were not included in this project, this strategy demonstrated the potential for replication in various contexts, wherein a platform could be created to encourage women and men to engage in a dialogue on an equal basis.

Redefining the community roles of women and men

NGOs' efforts at gender mainstreaming have gone a long way toward addressing the practical needs of women and other





vulnerable groups. Though, some of the effects of gender mainstreaming are less tangible, they can be discerned in the slow but impressive changes in gender relations at the community and household levels.

Involving women's SHGs in community leadership positions

Due to reduced catch, post-Tsunami, fisher families experienced periodic food crisis. As a result they no longer remained credit worthy and could not purchase rice on credit from the local grocery shops. PEDDA evolved a community-based food security mechanism. It provided rice worth Rs 64,000 (USD1600) to women SHGs who run an outlet to provide families in the community with rice on credit, which would last for 15 days. The payment schedule remains flexible, i.e., payments can be made on the day when the catch of fish is good. If a community member does not repay on time (due to wasteful expenses on alcohol) the traditional Panchayat intervenes. The system has been functioning smoothly. Members of the SHGs, manage the outlet for 2 hours a day every two weeks. PEDDA chose to run its community food security program through women's SHGs because of the level of trust that the community placed in the women, their fair distribution methods, and capacity to maintain meticulous accounts. Although the women members of the SHG did not receive any monetary benefits, they gained from increased collaboration with the traditional *Panchayats*, which offered a strategic opportunity for transforming gender roles in other spheres.

To consolidate the gains made by the Sangams' mechanism, Sangams themselves may be empowered to resolve conflict with the persons who defaults in payment rather than allowing the intervention of the traditional *Panchayat* for the same. Elsewhere there is successful intervention by the federation for conflict resolution, albeit between women. Building such alternative





institutions for conflict resolution will enhance the political spaces of women.

Field discussions indicated that women's SHGs had begun influencing the behavior and attitudes of men. Men who would not take up brooms and sweep the houses or by extension streets were motivated post-Tsunami by the health committees (comprising women SHGs representatives) to clean the streets. In Sivanarpuram, Cuddalore district, women noted that men were jobless and would often sit idle. They persuaded the men to share the work of cleaning the streets and segregating the garbage into bio and non biodegradable piles. This led to breaking gender norms in community work and men began cleaning the streets and water points and helped to segregate the waste once a week. As a result, women SHGs not only earned respect within the community but their initiative marked a significant change within a community where previously men had seldom been involved in such chores either in the private or public spaces.

Challenging the Stereotypical Image of 'Man'

Alcoholism among men is a socially condoned norm, and is viewed as a coping mechanism against stress. The escalating rate of alcoholism following the Tsunami has been discussed in a number of studies (TNTRC and CDOT, 2006). However, only a few interventions have addressed this issue.

Among the participating organizations, PRAXIS and PURA's gender mainstreaming

Although the venture of Health Food, a PRAXIS-supported project, does not yet have ready-market linkages, its noncash benefits have already reached the households of a few group members. The preparation of health food involves cleaning and roasting large quantity of grains. Spouses of a few members help in cleaning and roasting the grains as well as running the errands in the market. Men have started cooperating with the women in other areas too, such as taking care of the children when women are at meetings, and sometimes even cooking.





strategy addressed alcohol abuse. In Aaruthanganvilai, alcoholism and domestic violence, as elsewhere, are very serious issues. The interventions of PRAXIS through housing and microcredit projects have offered a strategic opportunity to address this problem. PRAXIS adopted a twin strategy: on one hand it supported women's campaigns against alcohol abuse and its adverse impacts at the community level, and on the other, it worked with the men's *Sangams* which were formed post-Tsunami. Gender awareness was an intrinsic part of the activities and norms such as de-addiction, and rejection of violence against women were made mandatory within the men's *Sangams*. Access to benefits, i.e., microcredit, housing, and boats were made conditional and wives were asked to verify that husbands were not addicted or violent toward them. The group takes disciplinary action against any member who fails to abide by these rules. Permanent houses were also used as an incentive to motivate members to abide by norms related to alcohol. There was a noticeable change in members of two men's *Sangams*. Most members reduced alcohol consumption and a few gave it up altogether. Notably, those who had given up alcohol were older widowers and were the sole providers for their children. The combination of sensitizing men and offering them incentives yielded positive results.

Along with empowering women with leadership qualities and raising awareness through SHGs, sensitization of men remains a crucial component on PURA'S agenda. It organizes periodic meetings of men's groups in which men abstained from drinking for the entire day and this helped build men's confidence with the result that some men are able to extend the period of abstinence up to 3 days a week. One member of a SHG in Vathakkavillai, Kanyakumari, reported that he had given up alcohol completely and now felt healthier. He said that this had also led to a marked decrease in verbal and physical abuse





(against his spouse) within their home. He was now more respected both within his community and in his home.

It was also evident that PURA's dual focus on sensitizing male groups while simultaneously working toward empowering women's SHGs had a visible impact on communities. Post-Tsunami, *arrack* vending in the neighborhood of *Pillaithoppu* and Muttom stopped completely. Since alcohol is not available in the vicinity, the frequency of alcohol consumption has been reduced. At the same time PURA engages both women and men in its social advocacy programs, which helps to keep men busy with activities such as pond cleaning, preparing timetables for the bus services, and rearing chicks which can be distributed to the group members as incentives to stop drinking.

**Shifting the focus to specific target groups:
Meeting PGNs and SGNs**

The above section has highlighted that participating NGOs focused on women in their rehabilitation and reconstruction programs, emphasizing the fact that they were sensitive to women's needs as well as their disadvantaged position in accessing resources and benefits. However, the NGO also made efforts to address the needs of the other excluded and marginalized groups.

Working with Elderly Women and Men

The NGOs adopted a two-pronged strategy in their work with elderly women and men. AVVAI Village Welfare Society, for example, addressed the issues of neglect and violence against the elderly at the hands of their sons and the need for livelihood for those who could still work. AVVAI worked to both restore and create assets for the elderly. A welfare scheme called 'Adopt a Granny' was initiated for those elderly persons who were too old to do any productive work. It provided care, support, and monthly provisions for meeting their basic needs. In addition,





a monthly medical camp was organized to provide medical care. In Nambiar Nagar, 12 elderly women and men benefited from this scheme. A 'Village Elders Care Committee' was also formed by AVVAI to sensitize the community toward its responsibilities to the elderly.

AVVAI also worked to empower the elderly by giving them access to resources and assets. For example, a group of 4 elderly men were given collective ownership of 15 boats. The NGO also desalinated 30 acres of land belonging to poor elders in Palpannaicherry and provided them with groundnut seeds for cultivation. In Akkaraipettai, Nagai district, elderly women were given goats. A revolving loan was secured for the elderly who could still engage in livelihood activities. These loans helped them start a wide range of income-generating projects, including artisan programs such as bamboo basket making. In Vengaya Koodai Mudaithal Colony in Velipalayam, Nagai, elderly women and men have revived the traditional occupation of making bamboo products, such as baskets. Such livelihood activities not only increased the economic security of the elderly, but also helped to reduce neglect and abuse at the hands of their sons.

Muslim Women

Muslim women benefited through several programs, which were run by the participating NGOs. Five organizations (HOPE, EKTA, SASY, PURA, and AVVAI) targeted this group in particular. PURA collaborated with a women activist organization working for the empowerment of Muslim women, by deputing its staff to work with the Muslim women and men in Pilaithopu, Kanyakumari district. AVVAI worked with Muslim women in Silladi

Muslim women (housemaids with very low pay, pre-Tsunami) have started cloth vending from door to door and earn much more than what they used to Self-employment, they say, has made them regain their self-respect as "now they need not mop the floors of other houses"





Nagar, Nagai, and assisted them in restoring their home-based occupations by disbursing interest-free loans through SHGs.

Irula Women and Men

The concerns of *Irula* women and men were mainstreamed by three organizations EKTA, SASY, and BLESS in their projects post-Tsunami. SASY helped the *Irulas* to arrange birth certificates, which enabled them to claim ex-gratia payment and other entitlements. Men and women were also taught to sign their names. Efficient monitoring by EKTA and BLESS motivated *Irula* women and men to send their children to school. In some areas, such as Kalaingar Nagar, *Irula* parents were so highly motivated that men reduced consumption of alcohol to save for their children's education.

SASY and BLESS constructed houses for the *Irula* community. BLESS, in fact, constructed a well-integrated complex with a *balwadi*, a health center, shops, playgrounds, and a community hall. The construction was community driven and *Irula* women were given equal wages. The skills acquired during construction were such that they could be used for alternative livelihoods in the future. SASY also created an asset base for *Irula* men and women by providing them with small boats or canoes (Toni) for backwater fishing.

Gender-Focused Documentation, Research, and Monitoring

The NGOs who participated in the field research employed varied and creative strategies for gender mainstreaming. The good practices, in many cases, stemmed from a gender-sensitive approach to program design and implementation, including the collection of gender-specific data and needs assessment, the development of gender-focused action research, and an on-going effort to monitor the gender impact of their programs.





Gender-Focused Documentation

FPAI maintains impressive documentation on the sexual and reproductive health work it carries out in Cuddalore district. Although its modest office in the District did not have computers or other facilities, the staff maintained meticulous records manually on a daily basis. Field visits reports, records of psychosocial counseling, and case histories were well documented. These can serve as useful references for the study of issues such as violence against women, misuse of ex-gratia payment, the escalating rate of alcoholism and its impact on women, men, and children. Gender sensitive documentation also helped in facilitating follow-up activities, monitoring and tracking of psychosocial changes within the communities where they worked.

CARE's documentation had a strong focus on widows, the destitute, girls, and physically disabled. The identification of target groups (such as inland-fishers and seashell collectors) for its relief work and its post-relief interventions such as livelihood assistance to widows and training of health workers have been influenced by the gender focused documentation it carried out in selected villages. CARE maintains meticulous data on widows in six villages; the data is disaggregated in terms of age and health status including conditions of disability.

SNEHA maintained documentation on sensitive matters such as suicides among women and girls in the aftermath of the Tsunami, the status of child labor and violations of rights of fisher women. SNEHA's documentation is an important resource for any research on gender issues and has helped inform the critique of policies that have sidelined fisher women by equating fishing as a 'male only' occupation.





Gender-Focused Research

One of the prerequisites for initiating any program by CARE Trust is to build a database. CARE Trust carried out a research study on the status of widows in 9 Tsunami-affected villages in Kanyakumari. In its research, CARE incorporated the vulnerabilities of both pre-Tsunami widows and those who lost their husbands in the Tsunami. This research presented a critique of the socio-cultural norms and traditional values that subordinate women. It has carried out a vulnerability study with a special focus on girls post-Tsunami, as well.

EKTA's research on gender issues in the context of the Tsunami helped to increase the visibility of women and their needs. The study emerged as an important document for charting out any plan for disaster preparedness. Based on a gender analysis that is rooted in a human-rights framework with reference to the Beijing Platform of Action and CEDAW, the EKTA study offers recommendations to stakeholders including policy makers to mainstream gender in the disaster management processes.

Regular Monitoring of Results

Regular monitoring of programs implemented and their impact is a crucial part of the gender mainstreaming process. For example, EKTA and BLESS monitored the various activities on a daily basis. For instance, they monitored whether children were attending school daily and persuaded them not to miss school. Girls in particular benefited from this monitoring system as they would have dropped out of school, due to the difficult life situations faced by their mothers in the aftermath of the Tsunami. This effective monitoring had a special impact on the *Irula* community in *Indira Nagar and Shanmuga Nagar, Cuddalore district*. Not only children but parents have also benefited; parents now take interest in sending their children to school punctually. Education for their children has become a dream for the *Irulas*.





Another, unintended but positive impact of the program has been a dramatic decrease in alcohol consumption and a strong motivation for saving among men.

While a majority of participating NGOs focused on household and community-level interventions, a number of them used the data and experience they had gained at the grassroots to inform advocacy and lobbying efforts at the District and state levels. For example, EKTA, SNEHA, and PURA participated in state level workshops to discuss the gamut of disadvantages faced by women in the Tsunami recovery. SNEHA and PURA also lobbied with the Government to bring about changes in the relief and rehabilitation policies. Gender-sensitive advocacy and lobbying efforts have initiated and sharpened the debates over “equity vs. equality,” where gender equity, above and beyond formal equality, is required to meet sex- and gender-specific needs. As a result of gender advocacy, Government policies and orders were analyzed through a gender lens.

The foregoing analysis has drawn attention to the gender mainstreaming strategies adopted by participating NGOs, particularly in the implementation of programs designed to increase gender equity in the Tsunami relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction. The analysis based on Rao and Kelleher framework has helped understand gender infrastructure as well as institutional and organizational changes brought about by the NGOs. It is evident that efforts by NGOs have succeeded in integrating gender concerns and questioning existing power relations between women and men at the level of all institutions, i.e, household, community, market, and State. However, evidence from the field shows that significant gaps remain which need to be addressed on a sustained basis. The following chapter presents a series of recommendations for strengthening gender mainstreaming efforts at various levels and across varied contexts.





End Notes

¹ *Many women recruited from the fishing community by the NGOs were specially proud to carry handbags to work. Through this simple act they broke the mold and overcame the prevalent prejudice against young women who carry bags and go out alone. Young women with handbags were traditionally not considered “good women” (discussion with the staff of EKTA, FAPI, and PRAXIS in Cuddalore and Kanyakumari districts.*

² *Implementation level here refers to gender mainstreaming strategies which informed the program implementation at grassroots level as well as in areas of research and advocacy.*

³ ***Sangam:** Rights-based self-help groups who do not focus entirely on savings and credits but use the platform to share and reflect on their experiences and work towards expanding their socio-cultural and political spaces.*

⁴ ***Taluk:** Taluk is an administrative unit, under District. A District comprises a number of Taluks.*

⁵ *Small van*

⁶ *Discussion with the head of PURA on unequal wages. Although ownership of assets by women were accepted by both men and women, the move for dividing the income equally between husband and wife was not accepted by the women themselves as they feared subsequent domestic conflict.*







IV

Toward Strengthening Gender Mainstreaming Efforts

*No intervention is neutral when the
players do not start as equals...*

This chapter discusses strategies that can help strengthen gender-mainstreaming efforts in various organizations at both the planning and implementation levels. It draws lessons from the good practices of the participating NGOs in this research. Several program design issues are dealt with, such as the need for integrated programming that treats gender as a crosscutting rather than an isolated issue and the need for gender focused research. An ongoing agenda for advocacy and lobbying around gender concerns is also discussed.

Mainstreaming gender concerns at the grassroots

Implementing gender mainstreaming strategies at the grassroots level requires several interlinked sets of activities, i.e., data collection, capacity building, provision of credit, and productive assets and skills training. Rethinking gendered division of labor and gender roles, as well as efforts to increase women's political participation are also areas that need to be systematically addressed.

Sex - and gender-disaggregated data

Most NGOs have attempted to collect sex- and gender-disaggregated data. However, it was evident that there was a need





to collect and compile data more comprehensively, keeping in view the context-specific realities. Inadequate gender analysis may often mean that organizations do not recognize the importance of, and hence do not collect or disseminate gender-specific data necessary to aid program design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation, as well as disaster preparedness.

- Aravanis including those who are professionally qualified
- Unmarried women in the households
- Widows not heading households
- Men as home makers and engaged in childcare
- Elderly women and men engaged in productive activities
- Homeless women, men, and children
- Women deserted by their husbands/sons and living alone
- Women with only girl children
- Women with chronically sick/disable spouses
- Indigenous and minority men and women
- Chronically sick women and men with disabilities
- Women living in violent situations
- Women heading or maintaining households. Data should included not only women heading the households but also women whose spouses are either not engaged in productive activity or do not contribute much to maintaining the households
- Pregnant and lactating women
- Women and men who are HIV positive

Data should be collected on the vulnerabilities and capacities of women, men, and aravanis. From the perspective of disaster management and risk reduction, constructing a capacity profile of women and men across social groups will help to indicate sources of resilience, coping strategies, and alternative livelihood opportunities that exist within communities.



Given below is an example of a checklist, that would yield comprehensive disaggregated data on the needs and status of various groups. Such a database would contribute significantly to gender mainstreaming efforts in disaster management.

Facilitating women's collective agency

Field research highlighted that the NGOs were most successful when they worked through collectives such as SHGs and federations at various stages of the Tsunami response. Therefore, strategies for strengthening self-help groups (SHG), federations, and *Sangams* should be incorporated as a necessary component of all phases of disaster management including preparedness and risk reduction. Toward this end, women's groups should be given training in disaster preparedness, strengthening their capacities, and building new skills. Gender sensitization trainings should include the need for women's participation in nontraditional roles and occupations and women's decision making in all phases of disaster management. Funding agencies on their part should play a supportive role in building capacities of NGOs in their efforts to enhance capacities of local women, marginalized men, and Aravanis.

Ensuring equitable access to and control over resources

Disaster recovery can be viewed as an opportunity to increase women's access to and control over resources at all levels. One strategy toward ensuring equitable access to and control over resources has been the provision of micro-finance through revolving funds.¹ However, these have an impact only when accompanied by strategies that aim at changing power relations and social norms as well as legal frameworks.

Post-Tsunami it was evident that asset creation for women, marginalized men, and Aravanis was necessary to break the vicious circle of low-value or no-assets (Refer chapter 2) as only those with visible and documented assets were eligible to claim compensation





for losses in the disaster. Collective assets such as market places, business assets, land, and assets that fetch rental value should be transferred to women's collectives in the process of rehabilitation and reconstruction.

Addressing gender division of labor and alcoholism

The research points out that there is a need to motivate both men and boys to share responsibility for non monetized work at home including cooking, cleaning, washing, fetching water and firewood, and taking care of children. Building these skills among men and boys has direct implications for disaster preparedness. Involving boys and men in household responsibilities for example relieves the burden on women and girls, positively influencing their health status and retention of girls in schools.

The Tsunami created an opportunity to work with men and women's groups. A focus on men is necessary to sensitize them to issues such as alternative gender roles and images of men and women.¹ Efforts must also be made to sensitize men to accept women's ownership and control of assets, as well as women's right to live a life free of violence in both private and public domains.

Gender and political participation

A process to sensitize the traditional *Panchayats* should be initiated to increase the political space available to grassroots women's collectives. Leadership training should be facilitated for women on a sustained basis to enable them to voice their demands in the decision making processes. The traditional *Panchayats* should be made responsive to accepting women in leadership positions and as owners of high-value productive assets. 50 percent representation of women should be ensured in all decision making bodies, at all levels, including the traditional *Panchayats*. Grassroots women's collectives, the research has shown, are already emerging as powerful pressure groups





with the necessary political perception to resist gender-insensitive practices of traditional *Panchayats*. The gains made in this direction should be consolidated and an ongoing process to strengthen the elected Panchayats should be initiated as part of a process of strengthening the political space of women, marginalized men, and isolated groups like the aravani population.

Addressing gender-based violence against women

Several issues, which affect women's dignity and well being, i.e., domestic violence, forced marriages, sexual and reproductive health issues, and alcohol abuse remain sensitive and complex and difficult to change. While most participating NGOs recognized the adverse impact of violence against women, very few were dealing directly with the issue of domestic violence. They viewed domestic violence as a private matter that takes place within the confines of the home. However, domestic violence is a serious and far reaching problem. It is cancerous in its effects on all sectors of the social system and must be brought to the forefront of political discourse. The strategic opportunities provided by disaster management process may be leveraged for networking with gender-aware organizations and to intensify advocacy initiatives to promote the human rights of women. Capacity-building workshops, on the multifaceted nature of violence, should be organized. Documentation and research is also required to highlight the various aspects of domestic violence.

Vertical Programming

Although the need for women-specific interventions cannot be denied, gender concerns must be integrated across programs both at planning and implementation phases. Funding should be directed through vertical programming (Femida, Meenz et al., 2006). For example, funding for livelihood interventions should make provision for childcare, healthcare facilities, and transportation. In the context of disaster management, round-the-clock childcare facilities can be



piloted by organizations with considerable experience in running *balwadi* centers to support disaster-affected women, girl children, and in some cases, single men who take care of their children. In the same manner, livelihood interventions including credit programs should be dovetailed with necessary infrastructure such as warehouses with locker rooms, bicycles and tricycles, and market linkages. *Anganwadis* should also be put in place to increase food security of elderly women and men. Pension schemes with adequate funds for elderly women and men, deserted women, unmarried women not heading households, and widows should also be institutionalized.

“We have marched along with men for many struggles such as the struggle against prawn farming. We thought we are strong women. It was the concern of both men and women. Men’s habit of drinking is breaking each household and yet there are no such marches. We had the prawn farming closed down, but we are not able to come together to eliminate this very force of destruction from our own homes which strips us of our meager resources and self-respect.”
(SHG leader, Chandrapadi, Nagapattinam district).

Documenting gender sensitive norms and practices of Documentation of gender-fair practices

It is important to document local customs and cultural practices. If NGOs do not take into account the local cultural contexts they may run the risk of imposing gender hierarchies and biases where none existed. Therefore, gender-sensitive norms and practices of identified communities must be researched and documented to form the basis of interventions across sectors.

A case in point is the *Irula* community which is more gender fair than other communities. There is much less violence against women, gender division of labor is fair, and less restrictions on women’s mobility. Moreover, common spaces for interaction between women and men are more prevalent. Prior documentation of such norms would guide



the interventions not to import the gender-biases of mainstream society into a gender-fair community.

Gender focused research

Gender focused research studies should be undertaken to inform both planning and implementation of programs and policy agendas of organizations. This would highlight both the gains and gaps in programs addressing disaster management processes. Studies focusing on gender issues should be widely disseminated through various forums to build and strengthen awareness on how issues can be interpreted and analyzed through a gender perspective. Findings should be pooled together to build a strong repertoire of qualitative and quantitative information on gender and disaster for ready reference.

Advocacy and Lobbying

Advocacy and lobbying are important tools to integrate gender concerns within the agenda of disaster preparedness. Post-Tsunami many feminist groups lobbied for mandatory registration of marriages to prevent child marriages in the context of the 'Tsunami marriages'.

National and state policies, including the National Disaster Management Act, must be discussed and analyzed through a gender lens. Grassroots constituencies, including aravanis, should undergo capacity-building exercises to increase their policy analysis and advocacy skills. In addition, international agreements such as the Beijing Platform for Action, the International Convention on Population and Development, the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, and national laws such as the Domestic Violence Act should be widely disseminated and used as effective tools for advocacy.





Broader institutional changes at a glance

- *Contributing to institutional change through women's training in nontraditional skills, breaking the stereotypes of asset ownership, occupation, and gender roles*
- *Challenging entrenched norms that subordinate women by denying them high-value skills necessary for market leadership and high economic returns*
- *Breaking caste stereotypes and social norms that ascribe lower position to Dalits in social, cultural, political, and economic spheres*
- *Creating collaborative spaces where men and women, girls and boys can sit together for discussion on issues of common concern, thereby challenging customs that require separate spaces for women and men*
- *Institutionalizing equal wages to meet the strategic gender needs of women to balance power relationships between women and men*
- *Focusing on the needs of single women by reaching out to their daughters and challenging norms of preferential treatment for male children*
- *Developing and disseminating gender focused research and information relating to the Beijing Platform for Action and CEDAW as tools for lobbying and advocacy.*





Strengthening gender mainstreaming within Organizations

Successful design, implementation, and sustained practice of gender-sensitive policies and programs are possible where organizations possess the necessary internal culture of gender sensitivity. Where gender perspective and analysis are missing among the leadership, staff, or donors of an organization, the following pitfalls are difficult to avoid :

a) NGO induced gender segregation

In the absence of gender analysis, organizations run the risk of implementing programs that impose gender hierarchies on communities where such hierarchies are less pronounced. A case in point is the Irula community wherein there is a relatively less strict gender division of labour. The NGO practice of segregating women and men when forming SHGs may inadvertently introduce new practices that may weaken the relatively high level of gender fair practices in the Irula community.

one NGO (not covered by this study) working with the Irula community distributed cell phones to male SHGs while depriving women SHGs of the same. Associating technology with men and depriving women is a classic example of bringing mainstream biases into a community where gender biases are less evident.

b) NGO induced increase in the workload of women

In some cases, women, with assistance from NGOs, may take on new productive and community roles, without any change in the division of 'reproductive' tasks at the household level. In such cases women's work burden increases manifold. Implementing women-targeted programming without a thorough gender analysis may result in an unintended negative impact.





A women's SHG bought a large capacity freezer with the interest-free credit they received from one of the NGOs. This helped them to make up for the reduced availability of fish locally as well as to reduce heavy head loading. They started going to the harbor in Kanyakumari late in the evening and came back home only around 2 a.m. the next day. After returning, they would clean the fish and stock them in the freezer. By the time they were ready to go to bed, it was time for their husbands to go to sea. While some women reported that they had started waking up late, others suffered from inadequate sleep. In some instances, old women experienced an increase in the work burden as they took up household chores in the morning. A majority of the women remained extremely fatigued and suffered severe bodyaches.

c) Increased burden of loans on women

While access to credit has had a positive impact on women's role in production and on their family's access to resources, there is also an increased burden of loan repayment. This is particularly true in cases where women who were not working outside home before the Tsunami have taken up economic activities without the necessary support or infrastructure.

Field research indicates that single women with many years of business experience pre-Tsunami were in a better position to make the repayment without resorting to borrowing from another source, than women who did not work outside the home before the Tsunami. Revolving funds were successful with women who were engaged in their business and had a ready market pre-Tsunami, such as shell sellers and trained tailors. On the contrary, where new experiments were tried out in the absence of market linkages, women were fraught with anxieties and increased work burden.





Many women reported that their spouses drink excessively. Some of them lived in violent situations, and lost workdays when they were physically battered and incapacitated. Women in such situations often need to borrow money from other sources to meet their daily needs, thus adding to their debt burden. Among single women, those living with their daughters appeared to fare better as daughters did not take money from their mothers.² (FGDs in Siluvai Nagar, Pillaithopu, Nuttom and Kolachal, Kanyakumari district).

d) Unintended consequences of targeting

At times interventions targeted at one group of men or women have been successful, but have had unintended detrimental impact on another group.

A majority of men, primarily Dalits, who were engaged in transporting fish from the shore to the lorries, and workers in ice plants lost their livelihoods as one NGO instituted a measure to assist fishermen by directly sending their catch to markets in Kerala. This increased the burden on women, who had to compensate for loss of income by working for low wages or borrowing from the moneylender. Women feared that, with accentuation of poverty, they would not be able to borrow money from the moneylender. It was through borrowing money that most women were able to retain their membership in SHGs to avail of the internal loans in times of crisis.³ (FGD with women and men in Kesavpalliyam village, Cuddalore district).

e) Exclusion of certain target groups amongst women

In the absence of context-specific, gender-disaggregated data certain groups may be marginalized or rendered invisible in the delivery of relief and rehabilitation. The aravanis and *Dalit* Azhi Pickers, for instance, were largely left out of the rehabilitation process. Similarly, the needs of the elderly population were also often neglected. Post-Tsunami, many elderly women were forced

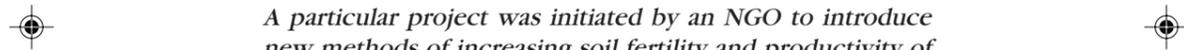




to work, despite their age and failing health, not only for their own survival but also for the sake of their dependents. There were many cases of elderly women supporting their grandchildren, either because the parents were killed in the Tsunami, or because the father remarried or abandoned his parenting responsibilities after his wife's death in the Tsunami. Concerted focus should be placed on elderly women and men in disaster management agenda. Attention should also be directed to the needs of single men who have started looking after their children as well as assisting their daughters in household chores.

f) Reinforcing gender roles and gendered division of labour

While many NGOs recognize the need to break away from the stereotyped roles of women and men, their programs and interventions may continue to still reflect prevailing gender roles and division of labor.



A particular project was initiated by an NGO to introduce new methods of increasing soil fertility and productivity of land required the cooperation of both women and men. However, the allocation of responsibilities among men and women was such that home-based labor intensive and time-consuming tasks were apportioned to women whereas the control, supervisory, and marketing tasks were assigned to men. The implementation of the project reinforced gender role stereotypes rather than effecting any change towards gender equality. Although the role allocation was not introduced by the NGO, it conformed to existing gender stereotypes and did not challenge them.

Building Gender Infrastructure within Organizations

Gender infrastructure within organizations can be strengthened by systematically putting in place a gender policy, developing gender sensitive indicators for monitoring and evaluation, introducing gender analysis of budgets, and by recruiting staff that is sensitive to gender issues.





a) Evolving a gender policy

Although a majority of participating NGOs had an implicit understanding of gender, only a few of had consciously articulated positions on gender in disaster management. Five out of the eleven organizations were in the process of developing a gender policy. This process could be strengthened by gender-sensitive organizational development, including workshops, development of toolkits, as well as through transfer of learning from other organizations (including feminist groups) working at the regional, national, and international levels.

NGOs need to be supported in developing gender policies and in setting targets for gender-sensitive internal changes. These bear implications for the organization's vision/mission statements, program design, monitoring, evaluation, and budgeting. A well articulated gender policy within the organization would ensure a framework that supports gender aware implementation.

b) Gender aware planning

A majority of participating organizations have integrated gender concerns into their program implementation, but have done so without a formal process of gender planning or budgeting. There is a need to integrate gender planning by analyzing the implications of each program on the practical gender needs (PGNs) of women and men and the strategic gender needs (SGNs) of women. In the context of disaster rehabilitation and reconstruction capacity, workshops on gender analysis should be organized to facilitate the formation of gender action plans.

c) Developing gender indicators in monitoring and evaluation

Putting in place benchmarks for gender-sensitive monitoring is an integral part of the infrastructure that facilitates gender-





sensitive project implementation. Essentially this means ensuring that all components of project monitoring include a gender component. This helps to track progress and promote accountability within organizations. An effective monitoring and evaluation system addresses the following:

- Unaddressed and differential needs of women and men.
- Analyses positive and negative impacts of projects on women and men.
- Ensures that gender neutral assumptions are not reflected in project design and implementation and
- Highlights constraints related to women's economic and domestic roles.

d) Gender responsive budgeting

A budget is gender sensitive when it is able to address the special needs of women and men. Creating gender equitable budgets means reviewing budgets from a gender perspective and translating the rhetoric of organizational gender commitments into budgetary commitments. A related question is one of implementation. It is not enough to know how much is being allotted to which head, but also to see how those resources are being used. This opens up a whole range of issues on the gender-differentiated nature of service delivery. Any analysis on gender budgets has to look into all these dimensions. If budgets fail to be responsive to the needs and demands of poor men and women, resources will not be adequately directed to the achievement of equity goals.

Most participating organizations have implemented women-specific economic programs in their response to the Tsunami. However, as mentioned above, analysis of budgets from a gender perspective is necessary to ensure that the resources spent meet the strategic interest of women. Trainings/workshops on gender





responsive budgeting could help NGOs sharpen their budgeting and gender analysis skills. NGOs can also benefit by attempting to transform gender needs into budget heads at the activity as well as proposal level.

e) Gender sensitive recruitment and staffing

Post-Tsunami there has been an increase in appointment of women staff in all the participating organizations. Recruitment of staff can be strengthened by making gender perspective an essential criterion to assess candidates during recruitment and appraisal. Innovative, gender-sensitive practices adopted by other organizations can also help evolve gender responsive recruitment policies at all levels. Formal qualification requirements should be relaxed in the case of women and marginalized men. It is also essential to appoint a gender coordinator to help integrate a gender perspective within organizations.

f) Gender-aware organizational change

Organizations must self examine practices, relationships, culture and level of gender awareness among their own staff and leaders. Organizational culture can be strengthened by following several steps.

g) Democratizing relationships within the workplace

To increase gender sensitivity, organizations must strive for an internal culture that is open and responsive to challenges posed by prevailing gender norms. Making women's voices more effective within the organization can further strengthen the gender equality agenda. This could be achieved by increasing the participation of women staff in decision making and leadership and by networking with other organizations. Gender is context-specific and is a constantly evolving theme and organizations must be able to adapt to new gender issues that arise on the global gender platform.





h) Gender sensitive organizational development

Organizational development processes rooted in an understanding of gender concepts and realities can help organizations build a culture of gender sensitivity. This may require inputs by gender experts experienced in analyzing both achievements and gaps for mainstreaming gender in the disaster management process. Such a process of organizational development would help evolve gender-sensitive policies in the areas of recruitment, performance appraisal, schedules, budgeting, and the integration of gender analysis all through the program cycles. It is also important to address both formal and informal norms, rules, attitudes, and behavioral patterns that institutionalize inequalities within an organization. Gender training is normally the route adopted to achieve greater awareness on these issues. However, unless such trainings become an intrinsic part of organizational development rather than a one off event it will fall short of its objectives. There is also a need to invest in building gender expertise across an organization so that it becomes an aspect of different sectors rather than the property of a stand-alone group of gender specialists who are required to address gender concerns at all levels. Gender mainstreaming requires that all performance appraisal systems incorporate incentives and penalties in relation to achievement of organizational gender equity goals.

Factors facilitating and hindering gender mainstreaming

The field research revealed several factors that facilitated or when absent, hindered the implementation of good practices.

a) Gender sensitive leadership

Several good practices initiated by the 11 participating organizations were largely an outcome of gender-sensitive leadership. Where the leaders operated in a gender-sensitive manner, programs focused on addressing PGNs and SGNs of





women. Innovative ideas materialized into practices both within organizations and in the implementation of their programs.

b) Gender sensitivity among donors

Gender sensitivity among donor agencies may be reflected in their programs and agenda. For example, a donor agency that is promoting livelihood program needs to ensure that their programs are furthering equal access to and control over resources along gender lines. It also needs to analyze whether the livelihood issues are addressed in an integrated manner, taking into account health, childcare, domestic violence, and political marginalization of women. The issue here is of building a necessary perspective so that programs and projects reflect a mature understanding on how to mainstream gender holistically.

Gender-sensitive donors in this research working in consultation with their partners have influenced the structure and delivery of relief packages. For example, some donor agencies insisted that relief be routed through the SHGs or *balwadis*. Most INGOs have also included sex- and gender-specific needs of women in their relief packages. Donor agencies also influenced the redistribution of assets and entitlements between women and men in consultation with partner NGOs. For example, a donor agency with an explicit focus on *Dalits*, indigenous groups minorities, and other most vulnerable groups influenced its partner organization to reflect on its vision, mission, and objectives to make them more inclusive, especially in the context of the Tsunami.

One of the participating organizations received funding for procuring a fish drier and to train fisher women to use it. Just as the women were ready to use the drier, the funds dried up. No resources had been sanctioned as working capital. The drier now remains unused. It has put the NGO under pressure to explain why after the trainings women cannot use it for income generation.





When donors respect local knowledge and expertise, it facilitates effective implementation. On the other hand, if local expertise is not taken into account, it may lead to conflicts between the NGOs and the donor agency.

One of the organizations advised the donor on the design of the toilets but its advice was ignored and external technical expertise was sought. Finally the design was approved against the recommendations of the participating NGO. This resulted in the construction of the eco-san toilets, but they remain unused.

Donor flexibility is necessary to sustain programs. Some NGOs have refused the funds from donors with complicated requirements and demands, such as having separate staff for their programs. For bold strokes of gender mainstreaming, the synergies between donors and the implementing partners is a major facilitating factor in mainstreaming gender.

Sustained funding yields better results and builds mutual capacities. Most NGOs reported that where sustained sources of funding were available spanning 5-9 years, integrated programming with a long-term vision could be implemented. One of the organizations had a 9 years' time frame for its interventions and felt that vertical integration of the programs was possible. The time frame reduced the need to speed up usage of funds, gave enough space to reflect on successes and challenges, and allowed for continuous interface with the grassroots.

Prompt dispersal of funds by donors facilitates timely delivery of relief, rehabilitation, and reconstruction entitlements to women and men. Conversely, when funds are sanctioned late, their very purpose in disaster response is defeated.

When building temporary huts in Dalit areas, the procedural expenses related to donor requirements exceeded real construction costs. The delay had left those whose huts had





been damaged in the Tsunami shelterless. This had major repercussions for women and children, who spend most of their time at home and need greater security and protection (interview with one of the participating NGO's heads).

It is not always necessary to have large funding for efficient programming. As good practices described above have shown, some organizations despite a low profile could initiate processes like building close contacts within communities to understand their vulnerabilities, capacities, and needs, which have long term implications for disaster preparedness and response.

c) Advocacy by Women's movement

Advocacy and lobbying by the national women's movement has helped to increase the visibility of gender issues in disaster relief, rehabilitation, and reconstruction. The leaders of a number of participating NGOs were also part of the broader women's movement. Placing gender discourse at the center of disaster management processes and raising the concerns in international arenas has facilitated a conscious and multilevel thrust for gender mainstreaming in disaster response and preparedness.

The issues discussed above stem from an analysis of gendered issues and the NGOs' gender mainstreaming strategies in the context of the Tsunami in Tamil Nadu per se. However, many of the strategies can prove useful for policy makers as well as INGOs. They may be of relevance in mainstreaming gender in the context of disaster management processes, i.e., relief, rehabilitation, and reconstruction as well as disaster preparedness. The concluding chapter identifies areas of further action both by way of research as well as advocacy.

End Notes

¹ *Alternative gender roles and images refer to those roles which are not generally accepted by women and men and the community at large, such as men taking care of the household and children or men being emotional and soft.*







V

Mainstreaming Gender in Disaster Management Opportunities and Future Challenges

The Tsunami disaster clearly demonstrated how gender cuts across the disaster cycle of rescue, relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction, mitigation, and preparedness. Due to the sudden and drastic changes that follow disasters, gender relations differently shape the impact on women and men and their coping mechanisms. Gender is also manifested in various sectors, i.e., livelihood, health, education, water, sanitation, food and nutrition, shelter, and the availability of other items. The entire disaster preparedness, recovery, response, and rehabilitation process, therefore, requires the presence of a gender perspective among all the stakeholders from affected men, women, and children to intermediary organizations as well as policy makers.

This chapter outlines the opportunities and challenges that confront policy makers, development planners, and practitioners as well as community workers to enable gender sensitive strategies for disaster risk reduction. It is divided into three parts. Section I highlights the major findings emerging from the field research analysis presented in the book. Section II outlines some future challenges and opportunities that can help in making disaster response gender sensitive at various levels. Areas for further research are outlined in the last section of this book.





I

Main finding emerging from the field research

Four important factors have emerged from the field analysis presented in the preceding sections:

First, disasters and disaster recovery are not gender neutral. Processes of relief, rehabilitation, and reconstruction, if not consciously implemented with a gender perspective can perpetuate preexisting social and economic vulnerabilities that are rooted in the unequal relationships of gender, caste, religion, ethnicity, and class. Gender, in particular, is an issue that cuts across all other sources of vulnerability as unequal power relations exist within most groups of men and women.

The present work has also highlighted that women typically possess fewer resources, have lesser autonomy and mobility, and bear the bulk of care giving responsibilities at the household level compared to men. Together these factors increase women's vulnerability to disaster risk, placing them at a disadvantage in disaster relief and recovery (Morrow, 1998; Enarson and Morrow, 1998a; Blaikie et al., 1994). Thus, gender is an important dimension of any disaster response and gender-mainstreaming strategies are an essential part of the process for building gender equality.

While women in communities with rigidly defined gender roles and division of labor remain marginalized, men too are caught between gendered demands and tightly defined notions of 'manhood'. Therefore, mainstreaming gender in disaster management entails bringing to the forefront the need for interventions that challenge gender relations by empowering women and sensitizing men. Involving men in reproductive activities leads to liberating men from their rigidly defined gender roles, attaches social value to these roles, and leads to behavioral changes.





Secondly, this research has revealed that gender mainstreaming is a complex process. The participating NGOs have succeeded in acting as catalysts for development of gender equality and have varied perspectives and strategies on mainstreaming gender. It is evident that the process of gender mainstreaming can be initiated at the institutional level even without an adequate gender infrastructure and gender-aware organizational practices; provided that the leadership of an organization and donors are gender aware. In that they are sensitive to the differential needs of women and men and willing to initiate changes to accommodate these needs.

The process of gender mainstreaming has small but important beginnings. What is important is the process itself and the way it is sustained and replicated. The gains from integrating gender concerns in disaster management may be economic or noneconomic. The latter would include benefits of collective action or enhanced self-awareness and self-esteem, it may be confined to a particular context (for example, where men have taken up reproductive roles including sweeping the streets). They may be strategic and supported by gender transformative policies.

As seen in the development context, women's collectives/forums provide the spaces for women to articulate their needs and concerns effectively. The field research clearly demonstrated that gender mainstreaming can be initiated at the local level by disaster-affected women themselves. When women came together on common platforms facilitated by NGOs, the space for sharing their experiences was enhanced. This also increased their mobility and self-confidence. Through collective action, women demanded their entitlements and challenged entrenched patriarchal norms in an effort to make disaster response more inclusive and gender sensitive.

Fourth, gender mainstreaming must also take place at the 'infrastructure' and 'organizational' levels. When institutional changes are guided by systematic development of gender infrastructure and





organizational change, there is a stronger will among organizations to address challenging issues such as gender-based violence and reproductive/sexual rights in the context of a disaster. Further, gender mainstreaming within organizations helps to ensure that gains made are sustained. It is evident that the benefits of gender-aware organizational changes, gender infrastructure and institutional changes will be reflected in the analysis of issues and design and implementation of programs.

II

Gender-Aware Disaster Management

There is now a widespread recognition in disaster discourse that gender is a central organizing principle in social life and hence in all disaster contexts (Enarson and Meyreles 2004). The challenge of mainstreaming 'gender,' which is problematic under any circumstances, is greatly exacerbated following a disaster, when 'tyranny of urgent' prevails and attention is on the prompt delivery of resources and outputs rather than on processes, or more specifically on how these interventions impact women. Sensitivity to individual rights and needs; cultural and traditional norms; and discrimination based on sex, caste, age and ethnicity are forgotten in an output-centered process (EKTA 2007). Consequently, gender is not a criterion, mindfully employed by Governmentas well as relief agencies to effectively assist the so-called 'vulnerable groups' in their special needs in an emergency or disaster setting.

A review of the strategies that have been put in place at various levels reveals the gaps that exist and the challenges to filling these gaps.

At the policy level, the National Empowerment Policy (2001) makes an explicit statement on the need to integrate a gender perspective in the development process. . A close reading of the policy reveals a mix of approaches to mainstream gender, with an





articulated shift from a welfare (service delivery) approach to an approach that recognizes women as catalysts, participants, and beneficiaries in the development process (National Empowerment Policy 2001). In addition, different ministries have covered a lot of ground for mainstreaming gender in various sectors.

In the context of disaster management several institutional mechanisms have been put in place to address disaster risk reduction, i.e., the National Disaster Management Act, National Disaster Management Authority, and the setting up of the National Institute of Disaster Management. The government of India is in the process of establishing the National Mitigation Fund. However, a gender focus is yet to be introduced by all the ministries in their disaster risk reduction programs. The absence of a National gender-focal point responsible for mainstreaming gender into disaster risk reduction is a major gap, which needs to be addressed on a priority basis.



It is also evident that clear guidelines are needed at the policy level for incorporating gender in National and state level disaster management policies for addressing both women's practical gender needs (PGNs) and strategic gender interests (SGNs).



Inclusion of women, in decision making capacities, in administration of relief camps, disaster management committees, relief committees, panels delivering aid, in policy boards for reconstruction and in any other body engaged in disaster redressal, will significantly contribute towards ensuring that these interests and needs are met.

Policy advocacy tools for integrating gender in disaster risk reduction also need to be developed along with tools for gender-based vulnerability, and risk mapping.

At another level, it is important to recognize that material as well as social losses is accentuated during any disaster situation. While material losses are tangible and easier to assess, the social losses/ disruptions are more difficult to appraise. These include breakdown of social and kinship networks, loss of protection and emotional





support services, nutrition, healthcare, and psychosocial distress. These losses are more exacerbated among the most vulnerable social groups, i.e., widows, women headed/supported households, disabled, aged and *Dalits*, and women with dependent children from the marginalized communities. Therefore, physical and legal protection should be provided firstly to the most vulnerable, in most cases, women and their dependent children. Developing a system for the collection of sex-disaggregated data would help in identifying the most vulnerable at the community level.

In many disaster situations physical and emotional losses are so severe and traumatic that stress levels interfere with recovery. Widespread subordination of women has meant that women typically bear more stress than men, including preoccupation with dependent children. Violence against women (VAW) has profound physical and psychological impact. It can be fatal, causing death and suicide, and can result in sexual trauma, unwanted pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, and emotional and psycho-social disorders. There are also negative social outcomes such as stigma, shame, and social seclusion. Violence also impedes women's mobility, impacting upon their ability to obtain food, water, and other necessities and search for economic opportunity (UNFPA 2005). The protection of women from sexual violence and exploitation must be a priority, particularly in temporary shelters/settings where women might be alone and at times when alcohol consumption among men is on the increase. Counseling centers to deal with the mental and emotional trauma faced by both women and men post disasters need to be put in place since both experience loss of lives and livelihood. Measures to prevent child abuse also need to be adopted.

Ensuring gender equality in livelihood programs is essential for revitalizing the local economies affected by disaster. In this context it is important to look at livelihood from a gender perspective. It is evident that livelihood is not only about income generation but sustaining families, the main responsibility for which often falls on women. Therefore analyzing the patterns of





expenditure and decision making is essential to understand whose needs are being met and how. For example, if a household spends a substantial amount of income on alcohol, it is draining the money away from sustenance needs of the household. It also implies that although women manage the households, they have no power to decide the way money should be spent. Weaving gender sensitivity in livelihood programs would include equal wage for equal work, joint ownership of assets such as houses, land and high impact productive resources as well as equal opportunities for income generating activities, and bearing the responsibilities by both women and men in channeling the resources for sustaining households. It is also important to recognize that reconstruction planning and action must be guided by local women's knowledge of livelihood and environment. Emphasis should be laid on creating capacities among women to take on nontraditional roles.

Empowering women politically by transforming existing women's collectives (federations for example) into effective pressure groups would lead to enhancing their spaces at the community as well as leveraging their bargaining power within the households.

Most often women are rendered vulnerable due to the socially constructed gender division of labor, social practices, and norms. There is a need for changing mindsets from perceiving women as 'vulnerable victims' to respecting their rights as citizens with a focus on strengthening the existing and building new capacities.





III

Areas for Further Research

Some areas for further research have emerged in the course of this study. As Enarson puts it, “Disaster research, practice and planning that is community based, gender sensitive, development driven and mitigation oriented can make a real difference” (Enarson 2001).

The present study has highlighted success stories concerning both grants and loans. Where women received grants/loans from NGOs for initiating small entrepreneurial activities it helped them rebuild their lives and livelihood as well as enhanced their confidence and self-esteem. There were also some unintended positive impacts, i.e., women came together and realized the potential of collective action, in some cases their spouses began helping in household chores, etc. Further research studies can be taken up to examine whether grants or interest-free loans have a greater impact particularly when analyzed in the context of disasters.

Women’s groups and federations, in some instances, guided by the participating NGOs in the delivery and distribution of relief, helped in making the process more gender-responsive and equitable. Research studies can be taken up across the Tsunami-affected states to examine the strategies employed by the self-help groups (SHGs) and federations to examine the delivery and distribution of relief. Both good practices as well as cases where there has been resistance need to be documented.

Another area of research is to understand NGOs’ strategies for engaging with men around issues of gender roles and domestic violence across the Tsunami-affected states. The present study has highlighted the fact that reduced sexual desire due to increased work burden among women, coupled with men’s adverse coping strategies

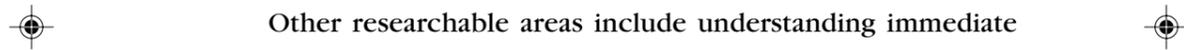




(such as alcohol consumption) has contributed to increased domestic violence. Further studies may be undertaken to analyze and document how women cope with men's increased sexual desire and expectations from women in times of disasters.

This study has touched upon and analyzed several gender issues related to persons from transgender community. More focused studies on transgender community and their needs in disaster settings are necessary across states. Such studies would provide valuable reference for stakeholders involved in bringing a gender focus to the agenda of disaster management.

Finally, this research points toward the need for analyzing the National Disaster Management Act from a gender perspective. Effective lobbying and advocacy must be taken up to incorporate gender-sensitive changes in the Disaster Management Act along with the explicit inclusion of Aravanis.



Other researchable areas include understanding immediate impacts of the Tsunami on poor, rural women and the capacity of the households to cope with the challenge of disaster. Alongside there is a need to understand women's paid and unpaid work, as women have to earn money on a daily basis for their survival before, during, and after disasters (Enarson 2001).

It is evident that men are as much a part of gendered roles and patriarchal structures in society as women. The expectations of men as 'breadwinners,' for instance, may lead to frustration among them when they lose their livelihood during/post-disasters. On the other hand the situation may cause them to value reproductive roles. There is therefore, a need to generate knowledge about gender issues in men's lives, e.g., disaster-related changes in division of labor, men's paid and unpaid work, men as caregivers in disaster, and interpersonal violence.





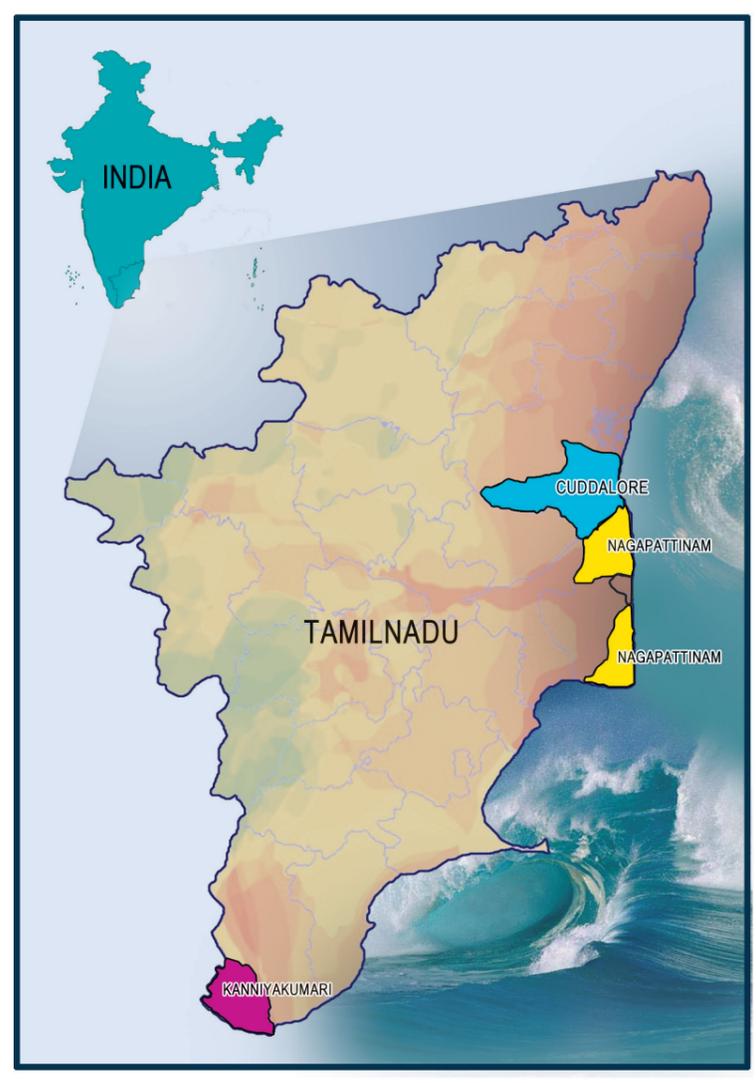
This work has focused not only on the lives of women, but dealt with differential impact of disasters on women and men as well as gender mainstreaming strategies in the context of disaster management. Using gender as an analytical category, the work underlines the systems through which societies construct gendered norms for their members. Although this study focuses on women's lives, it does so with the understanding that these lives operate within a system of gender inequalities and gender power relations. One of the overarching lessons emerging from the analysis presented in this work is that the different aspects of any disaster cycle—preparedness, recovery, response, and rehabilitation process—must be analyzed from a gender perspective. While it is evident that women's access to various resources need to be enhanced and their contributions recognized, it is also imperative to engage with men and sensitize them to gender issues to make them partners at all levels and all stages of disaster management.





Annex -1

Districts Visited



Annex -2

Villages / Project Areas Visited

1.	Kanniyakumari	CARE	Simon colony, Kodimunai, Muttam
		PURA	Pillaihopu, Akkarapalli, Pallam Annainagar
		PRAXIS	Pudunagaram, Silluvai Nagar, K.K. Thurai R.M. Thurai, K.P. Thurai, Kovalam Rajakamangalam, Aruthenganvillai
2	Cuddalore	EKTA	Parangipettai, Kalaingar Nagar, C.Pudupettai, Kuliyaru
		FPAI	Sonnankuppam, Singarthoppu
		SASY BLESS	Indira Nagar, Madha Kovil, Kodimaratheru Shivanampuram, Karrikam Nagar, Cuddalore O.T., C.Pudupettai, Shanmuga Nagar, Ennikaraitthottam, Panchakuppam, Samiyarpettai Pudukuppam
3	Nagapattinam	PEDA	Chandrapadi, Kesavapalayam, Perrumalpettai, Manigapangu Theru, Pudupet
		AVAI	Vellipalayam, Nambiyar Nagar, Goods Nagar, Sildi Nagar,
		SNEHA	Keechanankuppam, Seruthur, Jeeva Nagar, Thoduvai
		HOPE	Vellipalayam, Tharangambadi
		Trans- gender	Nagapattinam, Cuddalore, and Kanyakumari districts
		Kuruvars (Gipsy Group)	



Annex - 3

Short Profile of Participating NGOs

AVVAI: Avvai Village Welfare Society works in the field of education, health, women's empowerment and community development in the Nagapattinam district of Tamil Nadu, www.avvai.org.

BLESS: BLESS has been working for social and economic empowerment of rural community in Cuddalore district in Tamil Nadu, www.bless.org.in.

CARE Trust: CARE-T: It is the Secretariat of Voices from the margins (a platform for marginalized communities and organizations.) It focuses on campaign, advocacy, research and lobbying for socio-economic and ecological rights of the marginalized communities since 2002. Women, Youth, and Communities of Tamilnadu are the target groups.

EKTA: EKTA, is a resource center for women based in Madurai, The organization's focus is on protection and promotion of women's human rights. It works with women, children, adolescents, youth and men. www.ektamadurai.com.

FPAI: Family Planning Association of India, Chennai Chapter, committed to International Conference on Population and Development, focuses on the issues of sexual and reproductive health and rights of women and men. www.fpaiindia.org.

HOPE: HOPE Foundation is an independent affiliate of HOPE World Wide Ltd. that works for changing the lives of the poor. It has been working in Nagapattinam since post-tsunami.

PRAXIS: has been working with the marginalized communities by enabling them to fight against injustice and exploitation. www.praxisvision.org.

PEDA: People's Education for Development Association, has been working for the empowerment of Dalits, fisher folk, and the backward communities in Nagapattinam and Pondicherry districts since 1985.

PURA: PURA, run and managed by women, is engaged in upliftment of oppressed women and destitute children in rural areas in Kanyakumari district since 1993.

SASY: Social Awareness Society for Youths, a support center, has been working for the emancipation of Dalits, protecting and promoting their human rights in the state of Tamil Nadu since 1983. www.sasy-thesign.org.

SNEHA: Social Needs Education and Human Awareness, is engaged since 1885, in Nagai district for the empowerment of the unorganized and marginalized fishing community and allied fish workers, especially women, children, Dalit, minorities, and other marginalized sections.



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About the Book

This research study is a compelling uncovering of how gendered realities result in disasters impacting differentially. Through extensive field work in the Tsunami struck districts of Tamil Nadu, this study brings to the foreground, how deeply embedded and how widely dispersed are the attitudes, beliefs, and practices that perpetuate gender inequalities and how these influenced both the impact as well as its redress.

The study skillfully and sensitively explores and makes explicit the gender dimension in all phases of disaster and disaster recovery. It explores why more women than men died in the Tsunami, in case of survival why women suffered greater losses, and why, despite unprecedented levels of aid being extended, women's lives did not advance significantly.

Simultaneously, the study investigates the constraints men suffer as a consequence of gendered role expectations, an unexplored area in gender research. Further, perhaps for the first time the study brings to light the impact of a disaster on transgender persons and compels gender debates to reframe the enquiry to recognize their existence.

Disasters impact along fault lines produced by pre existing, socially constructed gender specific vulnerabilities. Processes of relief, rehabilitation, and reconstruction, if not consciously implemented with a gender perspective will deepen these fault lines. The study effectively makes a case for how disasters can present an opportunity, an entry point for action, to make gender the central organizing principle. Profusely illustrated with case studies drawn from the field, the findings of this study are very real and very persuasive.

About the Author

Chaman is a gender researcher and consultant and has been actively engaged, over the past decade, in promoting a deeper understanding of the gender issues. As a consultant, she has substantial experience in working for local, national and international NGOs in developing and implementing training, research and resource building in the diverse field of gender concerns. A member of the steering group of the Gender and Disaster Network, Chaman is a doctoral student in the Department of Politics and Public Administration, University of Madras. Her work centres on gender mainstreaming in the flood management.