



Australian Government



**Recommendations to the
National Reconstruction Authority on
Building Back Better and Safer for Gender Equality**

**Report from the series of events on building back better and safer for
gender equality jointly organized by the Australian Embassy, UN Women
Nepal and Sancharika Samuha Nepal**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On 9 March 2016 a panel discussion on “Building Back Better and Safer for Gender Equality” celebrated International Women’s Day 2016.

This discussion provided a catalyst for participants to explore women’s participation in leadership, identify needs, risks, issues and vulnerabilities for women and girls in reconstruction efforts in Nepal, and identify the collective resilience of women and girls in building back better and safer for all.

The momentum for building back for gender equality developed by the International Women’s Day event was maintained through an informal stakeholder meeting which agreed plans for a larger and more focussed workshop on the key issues of women’s relationship with National Reconstruction Authority Build Back Better strategies and broader Government policy on enshrining gender equity in Nepal’s new Constitutional society.

This report contains those views presented during the “Workshop to Follow Up - Building Back Better and Safer for Gender Equality” held on 17 June 2016. It highlights constructive advice from government officials, policy and decision-makers, donors, experts and advocates on the essential actions required to identify, recognise, encourage and harness the contribution of women in re-engineering Nepal’s society and infrastructure following the historic events of 2015 and into the future.

Overall Recommendations include:

- Ensure women are members of NRA’s executive committees and at local level structures within the broader NRA framework with input to the decision making process.
- Establish a formal mechanism where well-established common women’s groups at the community level can have their voice heard within the local level NRA structures, and actively train women in non-traditional roles such as masonry and carpentry.
- Decentralize crisis response facilities to help women and children obtain easier access to disaster management, relief, rehabilitation and recovery services.
- Create awareness of existing policies at the district level and identify the need for training through consultation with community groups.
- Focus on establishing gender friendly safe spaces/centers and potential linkages for delivering livelihood trainings in the enrollment centers.
- Conduct gender orientation trainings for existing NRA members and for engineers at both national and district levels.
- Link government grants (Rs. 200,000) and loans (Rs.300, 000) with policies to register the house/land in the joint ownership of husband and wife.
- Ensure women’s access to cash transfers and other benefits being provided by the State to the quake survivors, by helping them with the necessary documentation process.
- The NRA should develop a human rights and gender justice action plan.
- Local women’s groups and women’s networks must be mobilized effectively to help identify those particularly affected by disaster to ensure that nobody is left behind.

- Critical to develop/collect gender disaggregated data at every stage of preparedness relief and response, and communicate in relevant local languages to promote shared vision.
- Focus on strong collaboration and partnership among different sectors/organizations to ensure gender inclusion and build the resilience of the Nepali people.

International Women’s Day Panel Discussion on Building Back Better and Safer for Gender Equality¹

Discussion on gender friendly reconstruction to mark IWD 2016 was held as the first joint event with the Australian Embassy, UN Women and Sancharika Samuha.

On 9 March 2016, the Australian Embassy, UN Women and Sancharika Samuha Nepal, hosted a panel discussion on “Building Back Better and Safer for Gender Equality” to observe International Women’s Day 2016.

The panel discussion’s objective was to discuss women’s participation in reconstruction leadership and identify the needs, risks, issues and vulnerabilities for women and girls in rebuilding Nepal. It also sought to recognise the collective resilience and ability of women and girls in building back better and safer for all.

Speakers noted that in every natural and man-made disaster, it is women and their children who are most at risk and vulnerable. It was a historic opportunity for Nepal to revitalise the social norms which not only seek to protect women, but enable their rightful inclusion into the debate about how things should and will change. Women’s voices needed to be heard now and into the future.

There was need for a gender-friendly reconstruction process, because field observations told stark stories of deprivation. Nursing mothers and children for example were living a veritable nightmare. There was a wide gap between policy and its implementation, and the ongoing reconstruction drive should take ground realities into account while targeting gender-friendly infrastructure and awareness initiatives in earthquake-affected districts.

Nepal has an historic opportunity and a moral imperative to build back a better, safer and more equal Nepal for all its people. Women’s specific needs must be addressed and their skills and knowledge harnessed in the design, planning, decision-making and implementation of programs. Nepal’s women had the right to be equal partners in their country’s reconstruction, for without them a resilient and inclusive Nepal would simply not be possible.

The discussion was followed by a presentation of videos produced by UN Women and Sancharika Samuha and a presentation by a former NPC member which all explored how women were highly vulnerable after the earthquakes last year, and how gender issues should be better addressed in the reconstruction process.

¹ <http://un.org.np/sites/default/files/Joint%20Press%20Statement-%20Australian%20Embassy%20UN%20Women%20and%20Sancharika%20Samuha%20on%20IWD.pdf>

Follow Up - Closed group meeting Building Back Better and Safer for Gender Equality

On 27 April 2016, the Australian Embassy hosted a second event, a smaller meeting to maintain the momentum created by the first event on “Building Back Better and Safer for Gender Equality” on International Women’s Day 2016. This group included senior government officials, policy- and decision-makers, prominent experts and advocates to plan how to widen women’s participation in the build back and safer policy, and to promote women’s engagement to key decision makers.

The meeting discussed women’s representation, training, capacity development, orientation, and over-arching legal issues. Participants identified meaningful representation of women’s groups as an extremely important issue during the reconstruction process, but noted the need to remain cognizant of what was feasible due to pressing needs to expedite the reconstruction efforts. They identified a formal mechanism was necessary to ensure involvement of common women’s groups such as the mother’s clubs established within the local level structures of the NRA.

Participants saw the reconstruction process should have longer-term, non-traditional, income-generating training opportunities, including in the sectors of masonry and carpentry for women and girls. The timing and the exact location of such training should be appropriate in order to ensure the effective participation of women. The meeting agreed to suggest gender orientation be provided to existing NRA members at national and local levels. It was noted the NRA was hiring women engineers; and a request to MoFALD had been made to include women social mobilizers from the community level in district-level structures.

Discussion also covered legal and administrative hurdles facing women earthquake survivors, most notably their lack of proper legal documents, depriving them of compensation and benefits from the government. Suggestions included utilization of the reconstruction process as an agent of change to address economic as well as social and cultural aspects of society from a gender perspective.

The meeting agreed to facilitate a larger group workshop in June to provide progress updates on the gender responsive reconstruction efforts. The purpose of the workshop would be to validate key issues which actors can take forward on many levels including through providing recommendations to the NRA and Government.

Workshop to Follow Up - Building Back Better and Safer for Gender Equality

On 17 June 2016, the Australian Embassy, in partnership with UN Women and Sancharika Samuha Nepal, hosted a workshop on “Building Back Better and Safer for Gender Equality”. This was the third event hosted on the series of building back better and safer. The programme comprised a briefing on current reconstruction status from NRA and three thematic panel discussions: Representation of Women in Efforts to Build Back Better; Livelihood Opportunities and Capacity Development during Reconstruction; and Legal Challenges Faced by Women During/After the Earthquakes.

Panel members included former Chief Justice Hon Kalyan Shrestha, senior officials from the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare, the National Reconstruction Authority, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Department for International Development (DFID) and UN Rapid Enterprise, the Livelihood Recovery Project (RELRP), the EU Delegation in Nepal, and Oxfam.

Each panel member was asked to identify specific recommendations within the framework of the respective theme which, upon endorsement and approval of the full house, were to be submitted to the National Reconstruction Authority for implementation. The program began with a statement that reconstruction was not only about the nuts and bolts of building houses. It was an opportunity to re-calibrate a society which practices gender equity and actively encourages women to contribute to the decisions affecting their lives. Women in urban and rural communities have already shown courage and inspiration in rebuilding their communities' futures following the tragic events of 2015 and their contribution to society needs to be better recognised.

Acceleration of reconstruction was crucial for recovery and development. Gender-specific recovery communication strategies should be developed for informing people about the progress of reconstruction projects from a gender perspective. Women should also be involved in the process to effect change in society and at the state level. The issues and challenges to be addressed go beyond meeting women's specific protection needs. They must include ensuring women are at the centre of decision making and that they play their full part in building back their country.

NRA executive Dr Bishnu Bhandari, provided an overview of GESI activities undertaken by the NRA, including the provision of a GESI component in the Post-Disaster Recovery Framework (PDRF). The workshop heard that reconstruction and recovery would be incomplete if people covered by the GESI group (i.e. women, children, elderly, people with disabilities, minorities, marginalized) are not taken into consideration. Participants welcomed news that NRA ascribes a high priority to GESI.

THEMATIC SESSION

Panel on Women's Representation

The panel comprised Ms. Radhika Aryal, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare, Ms. Maria Barron, Director, Democracy and Human Rights, USAID, and Ms. Sharmila Karki, Member, Advisory Council, National Reconstruction Authority.

Panel on Women's Livelihood Opportunities and Capacity Development

The panel consisted of Dr. Karuna Onta, Social Development Advisor, DFID, and Ms. Arthi Patel, Principal Adviser, Rapid Enterprise and Livelihood Recovery Project (RELRP), UNDP.

Panel on Legal Issues

The panel consisted of the Honorable former Chief Justice Mr. Kalyan Shrestha, Andreas Roettger, Head of Cooperation, the EU Delegation to Nepal, and Prabin Man Singh, Policy & Research Coordinator of Oxfam in Nepal.

Overall Recommendations:

The overall recommendations of the **Building Back Better and Safer for Gender Equality** series of meetings and workshops are as follows:

Representation of women in efforts to build back better

- Ensure appointment of women members in the executive body of the National Reconstruction Authority (as there is still scope for the nomination of one more member).
- Ensure advisory representation of the WCDO in local level structures of the NRA and focus on increasing the capacity of the existing NRA members to perform their duties through a gender lens. Provision should also be made to represent women at the local level units of the NRA.
- Establish a formal mechanism where well-established common women's groups at the community level can have their voice heard within the local level NRA structures.
- Enhance collective concerted lobbying with key stakeholders for better representation of women at both national and local levels. (Meaningful participation of women in decision making at the central and local levels must be guaranteed as women know what the specific needs of women and children are, and how to best address them.)
- Proactively reach out to women as they may not have a tradition of coming forward on their own.
- Decentralize crisis response facilities to help women and children obtain easier access to relief, rehabilitation and recovery services.

Livelihood opportunities and capacity development during reconstruction

- Ensure women have access to knowledge development and exposure on how to engage in disaster management, as it is essential for women who are working and engaging at the community level. This will help make women become knowledgeable and facilitate their rise to leadership levels in the reconstruction process.
- Consider women's choice of occupation, what suits them best, and provide them with a safe and enabling working environment. (As of now almost 75 per cent women in Nepal are involved in agriculture).
- Create awareness of existing policies at the district level and identify the need for training through consultation with community groups.
- Undertake research on collection of specific data to identify the training needs of women at local level.
- Conduct non-traditional livelihood trainings for women and girls as this is an opportunity (through reconstruction) to change social norms and engage more women in activities like masonry and carpentry as part of reconstruction work. Women's ability to change social norms and practices through livelihoods must be recognized and utilized.
- Focus on establishing gender friendly safe spaces/centers and potential linkages for delivering livelihood trainings in the enrollment centers.
- Conduct gender orientation trainings for existing NRA members and for engineers at both national and district levels.
- Create a detailed checklist to monitor housing designs.

Legal challenges faced by women during/after the earthquake

- Link government grants (Rs. 200,000) and loans (Rs.300, 000) with policies to register the house in the joint ownership of husband and wife. (Land assets are poorly owned by women in Nepal, with less than 10 per cent women owns land).
- Ensure women's access to cash transfers and other benefits being provided by the State to the quake survivors, by helping them with the necessary documentation process. (Many earthquake survivors, especially women, have not been able to open the bank accounts mandatory to receive the first instalment of the grant of Rs. 200,000 that the NRA recently released. With their husbands abroad for work, women without citizenship in particular have not been able to access the cash transfer).
- Audit the entire NRA Act from a human rights and gender justice perspective. The NRA should develop a human rights and gender justice action plan.
- Set up a task force to look into the meaningful participation of women in the decision-making processes of the Authority, thereby increasing their leadership skills.
- Establish provisions for the joint ownership of land and for the construction of houses through grant assistance from the NRA/government.
- Ensure grievance mechanisms at all levels of the reconstruction process to guarantee accountability and transparency in the process, including a complementary feedback system through mediums like public hearings.
- Address social vulnerabilities, including gender inequality and vulnerabilities associated with land, along with physical vulnerabilities for a successful reconstruction of buildings and society.

General Recommendations:

- Local women's groups and women's networks must be mobilized effectively to help identify those particularly affected by disaster to ensure that nobody is left behind.
- It is critical to develop/collect gender disaggregated data at every stage of preparedness relief and response.
- It is critical to ensure that information is communicated from the national level in relevant local languages, both orally and in writing, to ensure that people living in the affected districts develop a sense of national policies and shared vision.
- Women need to be recognized as important contributors to all recovery and reconstruction work activities; they have all the potential to contribute to a better and safer future.
- Focus on strong collaboration and partnership among different sectors/organizations to ensure gender inclusion and build the resilience of the Nepali people.