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Impact of disasters on women and men

Realities for South Asia



ITDG studies in five South Asian countries¹ clearly show the differential impact of disasters on men and on women. They indicate how unequal relationships between women and men are reproduced and sometimes intensified in disaster situations, increasing human suffering. The studies also show the different strengths and capacities of women and men, and how gender roles and relationships can change in disaster situations.

3.1. Differences in social and cultural impacts

Usually, the impact of disasters is measured in quantifiable ways - such as adding up the numbers of the dead and injured, and estimating the physical damage to housing, land, livestock, agriculture, stores, and infrastructure. But attention is not necessarily paid to how disasters impact on different categories of people: men, women, children, aged people etc.

Disasters affect women and men differently, because of the different roles they occupy; and the different responsibilities given to them in life; and because of the differences in their capacities, needs, and vulnerabilities. The following examples from different South Asian countries convey that most of the gender-related differences in disaster situations arise from the different roles and responsibilities that women and men undertake in their day to day lives.

In situations of disaster, the gendered division of labour becomes critical as gender roles are often seen to be re-enforced and even intensified - due

¹ITDG South Asia, Research studies on 'Gender issues in Disasters' carried out for the regional project 'Livelihood Options for Disaster Risk Reduction in South Asia', ITDG South Asia, 2001