

Relocated Housing Schemes and Women's Vulnerability: A Sociological Study of Tsunami Relocated Housing Schemes in Eastern Sri Lanka

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Abstract

This study undertakes to critically investigate the issues of relocated women by considering five indicators such as land, livelihood, social infrastructure, security, and community organization. The main objective of the study is to analyze how the anomalies of relocated housing schemes exacerbate the vulnerability in such social environments. The specific objectives of study are to characterize women's roles in participatory recovery efforts, to show the nature of community organizing patterns in relocated communities, and to assess the suitability of methods to women's socioeconomic empowerment in relocated places. The empirical data collection was limited to selected Tsunami-affected relocated areas in the Trincomalee, Batticaloa, and Ampara districts of Sri Lanka, and the qualitative data was primarily collected through personal and group interviews, and study of the case histories of the relocated women. The study could observe that, women's voices were mainly ignored in recovery initiatives, and women in relocated areas were unable to communicate their special interests in the design of reconstruction and rehabilitation programs. In the emerging homogenous and heterogeneous social fabrics, asymmetric power relations have developed among all types of stratified categories of individuals, effectively marginalizing women; furthermore, the displacement resulted in the loss of impacted people's conventional sources of income, and their new environs made it difficult for them to adapt new livelihoods. The study finds that as a result of this predicament, women became more reliant on their male household members, who appeared to be the only possible breadwinners in such anomalous social contexts, and concludes that, women became increasingly vulnerable to violence as a result of weak community organizing, laxity in social control, and fissure in solidarity. The study emphasizes the need for post-disaster participatory development initiatives in relocated settlements to adapt their approaches.

Keywords: Reconstruction, Relocated housing schemes, Women, and Vulnerability.

1.0 Introduction

Reconstruction is a vital activity in rebuilding post-disaster societies. Reconstructing Physical infrastructure of a community has certain effects in refurbishing social relationship of affected community members, since disasters bring about breakages not only in physical construction of a community, but also in social construction of it. Physical infrastructure is an essential component to a community to maintain its social order since infrastructural elements serve the needs of community members. Reconstruction and rehabilitation are the preliminary steps of a recovery process for the disaster affected communities. Indeed, effects of those 2Rs are still questionable in

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refurbishing social life of all segments of community members. Restructuring the community life accentuates the requirement to reconstructing the physical infrastructure in post-disaster recovery. Whether Resettling them in their previous places or relocating them in new locality after the displacement, participatory nature of reconstruction projects provides the most compelling argument for the participation of civil society in recovery processes.

Gender issues persist throughout all aspects of reconstruction and post-disaster development process. However, women are often ignored in reconstruction process. (Harris, 2004). This study is a qualitative analysis on selected Tsunami relocations in Eastern province and highlights a specific outlook on women's condition in those relocated housing schemes. The study examines five indicators; land, livelihood, social infrastructure, security and community organization, to critically analyze the status of women in such relocated community structure.

1.1 The objectives

The main objective of the study is to analyze how the anomalies of relocated housing schemes exacerbate the vulnerability in such social environments. The specific objectives of the studies are

1. to describe the role of women in participatory recovery activities,
2. to illustrate the nature of the community organizing patterns of relocated community structure and
3. to evaluate the appropriateness of the approaches of socio-economic empowerment of women in relocated areas.

1.2 Theoretical Background

To a certain extent, community relations are essential to fulfill individual's needs, since members of a community share common interests. Mutual dependency in relationship among community members is determined by the necessity of achieving goals of their community life. When people in a locality establish a social relationship, they display cohesiveness among them. The cohesion is not a matter of reciprocal relations of individuals, but it is a sharing of common goals and interests. Therefore, a community reflects a belongingness of common relations (Friedkin, 2004: p.409-425). Infrastructure become an essential aspect of socio-economic activities of a

community and determines the quality of life of the community members. In functional perspective, infrastructure plays vital part to the functions of social institutions; family, economy, religion and education, in serving needs of the community members. When needs-related and service-oriented infrastructure of a community is damaged, economic and social functions of the community are severely affected. And unsatisfied needs of people lead to many social issues, prominently conflicts among community members. (Oliver-Smith, 1990: p.07-09). Reconstructing infrastructure is one of the best possible ways to rebuild community integration and to restore community life of disaster-affected communities as if the reconstruction work restores or establishes mechanisms to serve community people's needs. Nonetheless, when the reconstruction interventions fail to address the needs of community people, these lead to exacerbate the existing social issues, and when the designs of reconstruction projects are not match with communities' interests or when the implementations of such projects fail to accommodate people's concerns these reconstruction initiatives generate new conflict within or between communities (Majd and Andalib, 2013: p.40-43).

While gender issues are the serious social problems even in normal social order, and in disaster-affected social environment, women acutely face gender-based marginalization and discriminations. Over the years, development initiatives have come under fire for failing to consider gender roles and how they affect women in the developing world. In an effort to eradicate poverty and low socioeconomic status, it is now a trend toward including women in development efforts. Women in Development, Woman and Development, and Gender and Development concepts have been so entrenched over the past three decades that they have influenced how development has progressed, particularly as they relate to women. These trends/approaches seeing have altered how society has engaged with women and gender in the workplace. From a liberal feminist paradigm, Women in Development (WID) developed in the early 1970s. Its fundamental goal was to involve women, who were historically seen as passive recipients of any advancement, in the process of development. The Woman and Development (WAD) strategy is oriented on women solely seeking the need to develop women-centric programs that are designed to safeguard women's interests from patriarchal dominance. Gender and Development (GAD) emerged in the 1980s as a result of the flaws in WID and WAD. Additionally, it was influenced by Third World feminists' writings and experiences with grassroots organizations. It expanded mostly as a result

of a lack of success in transforming the lives of women and influencing the larger development agenda with WID as a policy. Unlike the WID approach, which sees the lack of women in development plans and programs as the issue, GAD is focused with tackling the fundamental, gender and class inequality that generates many of the practical challenges women confront in their everyday lives. As opposed to the WID, it addresses strategic interests in a way that includes or empowers women as agents, can improve women's status in society, and can change gender relations and attitudes. (Moser, 1993)

1.3 Statement of the problem

When people become directly affected by natural disasters, they develop a central interest in contributing to the recovery of their community. Despite being confronted with harsh realities and huge dilemmas; civil society actors can make significant contributions to recovery projects. Their capacities may help to create the conditions for rebuilding their social life. The nature of destructions in the post-disaster recovery period provides the most compelling argument for the participation of civil society in recovery processes. It is not just that the natural disasters caused death of community members, but devastated their infrastructure and institutional structure. Individuals, the family and the community are again entitled to a problem of order. As people become directly affected by a natural disaster, they develop a central interest in contributing to recover their social life. Living in a recovery era and alongside the aid actors, they have greater need, and greater potential to take part in recovery projects. And as recovery processes increasingly result in changes to economic and social institutions and relationships in a society, people also have a right to participate in these processes (Jeong, 2006: p.24).

It's necessary to any organization involving in the recovery activities to get clear understanding about the traditional make-up of the community concerned. Getting familiar with the social structure, primarily norms and values, of the particular society is one of the prerequisite for actors engaged in recovery activities to make their tasks successful. And this will also be helpful to actors engaged in recovery activities to identify the problems, to recognize the areas to which priority should be given and get clear-eyed with the target activities. Participation of civil society in the recovery activities will be beneficial for actors engaged in recovery activities to furnish the abovementioned necessities. By advocating and facilitating dialogues, civil society can bring the

mentality of members of the community towards recovery activities. It can also generate a central interest, or be instrumental for consensus building, in the process of recovery. Civil society can have its involvement in recovery from the very outset of the recovery process, and it can exert its influence or bestow assistance in designing and implementing recovery activities. (Bough, 2006; 230). Public mobilization via community organizing is prominent for the recovery process and is expected to be brought up by civil society.

Gender inequality and stereotyping continue to be a major societal problem in a variety of fields. Women's status in the planning of sustainable cities has not improved significantly. Housing is one example of this, with many civilizations, including those from both developing and established countries, believing that males have more ownership rights than females. Home ownership by women is still rare. Women are still at a disadvantage when it comes to buying a home, despite the fact that the disparity is more based on income than on gender, yet income is based on gender as well, given women's lower salary. Patrilineal family traditions also disadvantage women, with males regarded as the head of household and owner of the family home by the community and government.

2.0 Methodology

This descriptive study is mostly reliant on qualitative data collected through individual and group interviews and case studies. Field data collection was confined to selected Tsunami affected Tamil and Muslim communities, both relocated and resettled, in Batticaloa and Ampara districts of Eastern Sri Lanka. 05 to 06 respondents were selected for key informant interviews from each village taken for study. Purposive sampling was used to select informants for key informant interviews. Questions posed in key informant interviews were focused on their socio-economic and cultural patterns, social issues and their overall opinion about post-Tsunami reconstruction works in their community. In addition to this, around 03-04 group discussions have been conducted to collect information regarding general issues. Men and women community members and youths were involved in group interviews. Participants were selected by using random sampling method. Each and every group interview was directed towards getting information about changes in their lifestyle after the resettlement or relocation, and their perceptions and experiences of post-Tsunami reconstruction intervention. Beneficiaries of reconstruction projects were

specifically targeted to gather information related with the quality and efficiency of the reconstruction output. Information related to community life was gathered through observation. Case studies were also incorporated in the primary data collection processes. Snowball sampling method was used to select persons for the case study.

2.1 Brief overview of study communities

The study was confined to selected Tsunami affected communities in Eastern Sri Lanka. Five Tsunami affected communities from two districts in Eastern province were comprised in the research area. Navalady and Thiraimandhu in Batticaloa district and Maruthamunai, Sainthamaruthu and Mandanai in Ampara District were the communities which were deemed to serve the study purpose. Navalady is a resettled coastal village, dominantly inhabited by Tamil Fishing community. In Thiraimadu, the study selected Swiss village in Pannichaiyadi Grama Niladhari division (GN). It's a relocated community; Burgher communities in Dutch bar and few Navalady Tamil people were relocated here. Burghers are the ethnic majority in the population and majority of the households are not dependent on fishing. In Ampara district, Maruthamunai and Sainthamaruthu are predominantly occupied by Muslims. In Maruthamunai, 03 out of 06 GN were selected and the major livelihoods in the areas are fishing and handloom. In Sainthamaruthu, 05 out of 19 GN divisions were selected for the study. 70% of the population in the area relied on deep sea fishing and fishing related business activities for their income generation. Mandanai in Ampara District is a relocated village; Tsunami affected people from Thampaddai, Thirukovil -04 and Vinayagapuram were given houses in the scheme. Paddy and crop Cultivation and fresh water fishing are the main livelihood sources for these people.

3.0 Results

The study identified that, voices of women in recovery interventions were largely ignored and therefore women in the relocated areas were unable to articulate their specific interests in designing reconstruction and rehabilitation projects. Asymmetric power relations prevailed among all types of stratified groups of people substantially marginalized women in the new homogeneous and heterogeneous social fabrics.

Participation of women in reconstruction activities was limited due to various factors embedded in institutional set up of family, nature and culture of community organizing and the way of project implementation.

In families, there are two ways in which women are intentionally prevented to express their concerns in recovery activities. Firstly, in almost all communities, women face difficulties to take decisions at the household level in matters related with public concerns. To a certain extent, house wives could not express their own interests even in household affairs. Hence, affairs related with construction are deemed to be non-related affairs for women in the men's point of view. Women also perceived that the construction related issues are the matters of men of their families. Therefore, they themselves set apart from concerning construction activities. Secondly, in all communities, women are burdened with domestic chores and other income related activities at their homes. Since their family men spend the day time outside homes for daily income generation and migrate for weeks to engage in seasonal economic activities, women have to take care of their siblings and elder members of their families. Therefore, they do not have any concern over the community issues and indeed they do not have time to spend.

Community organizing patterns also impede active participation of women in communal activities. While community-based organizations (CBO) are theoretically expected to play primary role in articulating central interests of the communities, in project areas, CBOs have specific weakness in this regard, since it was fragmented in the communal lines of class, family and gender. In addition to the specific weakness, CBOs of project areas appeared to have the inherent difficulty of moving beyond articulating specific interests to aggregating a broad agenda. It is identified that CBOs are only capable enough to create general consensus on matters not relevant or not very much important for rebuilding social structure and to some extent played a role intentionally to ignore principle participation with other organizations engaged in recovery project in their areas. It is made out that, in project areas, there has been a difficulty to get equal participation from members of all categories of the communities. Vulnerable and powerless population was marginalized in the arena of contribution and participation in recovery tasks. Such kinds of marginalization occurred along with the unequal layers of gender and caste. Prevalence of traditional cultural practices in relocated areas perpetuates barriers to bring women towards reconstruction activities.

From the implementation point of view, many reconstruction activities were not consulted with community people. Partiality in selecting beneficiaries for housing schemes and biased-political and administrative patronage in allocating construction benefits to the community people generally set apart the community's concerns from the project implementation. This adverse tendency is not only limited the participatory nature of the community, but largely kept women away from getting benefits from project activities.

Besides, the displacement caused the loss of traditional source of income of affected people, their relocated environments hardly allowed them to adopt new livelihoods. This kind of situation naturally led women to be more dependent on their male household members who seemed to be the only possible breadwinners in that anonymous social environments.

Further, weak community organizing with suppleness in social control and cleavage in solidarity made women become more susceptible to violence. Anonymous, heterogeneous social environments due to relocation and economic dependency on male members of the family make them more vulnerable to sexual and domestic violence.

4.0. Community organizing as a coping mechanism

As far as this study is concerned, women are largely ignored in reconstruction activities in Post-disaster communities. There are many drawbacks in incorporating the active participation of women into the project activities and in the project implementation point of view, issues of community organizing in post disaster social order pose certain challenges for participatory nature of reconstruction activities. It is found that in-depth engagement of community members consisting of all segments was missed in all projects in the study area. And it is necessitated that community organizing is essential to overcome the above said challenges. Promoting community organizing is required for moving from traditional model of community organizing towards a new one. Generally, community organizing refers to that process or methodology for motivating people to act as a group towards some developmental goals or objectives. Based on this general concept, traditional model of community organizing is aimed to get people and institution to fight for and win resources. Working with this narrow scope will not be worth to overcome those challenges

arising in implementing recovery activities, since it can create more competitive social relationship with in civil society members and complicated situation to be handled for project actors. New model of community organizing is proposing a broad scope and this could be appropriate one to cope with those issues in recovery activities (Rothman, 1972, 74). According to the new model, community organizing is a process of motivating people to act as a group towards development goals or objectives. This strategic way of community organizing would be instrumental to encourage women to actively participate in any type of development interventions.

Capacity building is also essential to make social arrangements compatible with recovery activities. It should be taken at the outset of this project. Capacity building is a critical concern to manage the transition from relief period to recovery period since the pace of transition to recovery varies from community to community. This is early need for strengthening civil capabilities to carry out recovery tasks smoothly. As the early concern of recovery is the reconstruction of the community, it is necessary to promote the capacity of the community so as to support recovery activities. Civil society should be strengthened as to respond spontaneously and rapidly to unmet recovery needs. (Bauer, Bigdon and Korf, 2003, p.63). As civil society groups have also been essential for organizing recovery operations in cooperation with NGOs, local government and national authorities, capacities of civil society members in relation with recovery task can be enhanced through awareness programmes, training seminars, and workshops. (Nakagawa and Shaw, 2004, p.06-07). In case of women empowerment, there were many initiatives made by the government and non-government organizations to build the individual and organizational capacity of women members and women CBOs in the study locations. However, those efforts of empowering community women didn't make considerable progress in the conditions of women's engagement in reconstruction process for certain reasons. Firstly, almost all empowerment activities in the study communities targeted women only for their project activities, considered women as a separate groups and failed to incorporate men of the communities. Secondly, women development initiatives also failed to consider traditional patriarchal and cultural structures of the communities. Therefore, women who were empowered under women development project activities could not make any considerable changes in the gender situations of the communities since the women beneficiaries of the projects were not able to confront with traditional and cultural

gender structure of their own communities and continued to be controlled by their male household heads.

5.0 Conclusion

Post-disaster physical and social environments are anomalous social conditions which characterize with social issues related with disorders. Social contexts in such jarring situations juxtapose social life of community members in normal social order. Relocated housing settlements are new social environments that pose severe challenges for settlers to adapt the situations. Difficulties in cope up with such challenges further jeopardize the security of vulnerable groups like women, children and persons with disabilities. Gender divisions are social arrangements and are also associated with social issues of marginalization and discrimination. Social conditions in relocated housing settlements are not conducive to ensure the equality of participation and engagements in community affairs for women. Though the communities of relocated housing schemes are cosmopolitan in nature, their traditional gender construction remained unchanged. This situation impacts on women, in their perspectives on reconstruction.

Gender division of the study communities are almost traditional and still adhered to traditional cultural values. However much the influence has been exerted on the changing economic engagements of women, in relocated areas, by means of rehabilitation interventions and livelihood projects, they have hardly made changes in gender situations. Reconstruction and other related development interventions require participation of beneficiary community and such participatory development initiatives imperatively necessitate the inclusiveness of all segments of a community. However, situation of women in relocated areas has not improved yet to enable them to freely engage in community activities; women were largely ignored in decision-making process and they are bounded with domestic works and culturally expected to abstain from engaging in construction related development endeavors. Women are more likely to get benefit from livelihood development projects, as the study found, that are particularly targeted at specific women's economic activities. Unless and until the change in gender situations is made possible in communities, it is quite difficult to improve the socio-economic conditions of women in relocated areas.

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