

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT DIALOGUE

# RDDD

Vol. 30, No. 1, Spring 2009

## GENDER AND DISASTER MANAGEMENT

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## EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

# Gendering Disaster Risk Reduction: Global and Regional Contexts

Maureen Fordham

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This Spring 2009 issue of the *Regional Development Dialogue (RDD)* presents examples of, and gaps in, gendered disaster risk reduction (DRR) initiatives and issues from around the world. The articles illustrate the intrinsic relationship between disaster and development: more specifically, between DRR and sustainable development. They further underline how the integration of gender is vital for realizing the key global policy initiatives of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the *Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA)* (see tables 1 and 2),<sup>1/</sup> which are explained in more detail below. The fact that we must deal with two major policy initiatives, plus a cross-cutting concern (gender), hints at the challenge we face.

### The Millennium Development Goals

In 2000, 189 countries endorsed the *Millennium Declaration* at the United Nations in New York, and this was later translated into eight time-bound and measurable goals to be reached by 2015: the MDGs. Table 1 presents the goals, but only selected targets which are most relevant to this article.<sup>2/</sup> The first and primary goal is to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger. Gender considerations appear explicitly here and in other goals (we discuss below the slippage between policy statement and implementation; and the (debated) link between gender and poverty is raised in subsequent articles), and yet there is a missed opportunity to include a DRR constituent. Even without a distinct DRR goal, an easy place of inclusion would be within Goal 7, “Ensure environmental sustainability”. However, this goal has the broader domain of environmental resource management as its principal focus. Thus, we have a missed opportunity to bring together the habitually separate spheres of disaster and development.

### Hyogo Framework for Action

Several years later, the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UN/ISDR) took the lead in the development and implementation of the *HFA* (see table 2). Formed partly in response to criticisms of the overly technical/technological direction of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR), the *HFA* set out to foreground the social dynamics of disaster risk and bridge the disaster-development divide. The *HFA* is built upon the understanding that the achievement of DRR is inextricably linked to sustainable development, poverty reduction, and good governance objectives, and that together these are necessary elements to achieve the MDGs.

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**TABLE 1. MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS, 2000**

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1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger.
    - Achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all, including women and young people.
  2. Achieve universal primary education.
    - Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling.
  3. Promote gender equality and empower women.
    - Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015.
  4. Reduce child mortality.
  5. Improve maternal health.
    - Reduce by three quarters, the maternal mortality ratio.
    - Achieve universal access to reproductive health.
  6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases.
  7. Ensure environmental sustainability.
    - Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes and reverse the loss of environmental resources.
  8. Develop a global partnership for development.
    - Develop further an open, rule-based, predictable, non-discriminatory trading and financial system.
    - Address the special needs of least developed countries, landlocked countries, and small developing states.
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**Source:** United Nations, *The Millennium Development Goals Report 2008* (New York: UN, 2008).

**TABLE 2. FIVE PRIORITIES OF THE HYOGO FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION (HFA) 2005-2015**

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1. Ensure that DRR is a national and a local priority with a strong institutional basis for implementation;
  2. Identify, assess, and monitor disaster risks and enhance early warning;
  3. Use knowledge, innovation, and education to build a culture of safety and resilience at all levels;
  4. Reduce the underlying risk factors; and
  5. Strengthen disaster preparedness for effective response at all levels.
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The five *HFA* priorities for action are not individually explicit about gender but, instead, *HFA* maintains that, “a gender perspective should be integrated into all disaster risk management policies, plans, and decision-making processes.” In other words, gender is regarded as a cross-cutting concern; however, does this mean it is everywhere and nowhere? Several articles in this issue present examples, and absences, of gendered disaster risk reduction (GDRR), and we return at the end to questions concerning the institutionalization of gender.

### **The Articles in This Issue**

The articles range from the global to the local and across a number of important gender issues of concern for sustainable DRR. Across countries and continents, we can see many common themes emerging: problems in the institutionalization and implementation of GDRR; the cross-cutting issues of poverty and violence; the continued stereotyping of gender roles; and the need for a more complex understanding of the intersection of gender with other social dimensions.

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The first article in this issue sets the scene at the global policy level. Carolyn Hannan describes how we have seen policy shifts away from an almost exclusive technical/technological approach towards greater recognition of the role of human behaviour and social settings, but still we find little priority for gender. While women's vulnerability in disasters has become more generally known, the more positive aspects of women's and girls' strength and resilience, and their actions in risk assessment and prevention, are still not captured in much policy or practice. Furthermore, notwithstanding the continued calls to collect sex-disaggregated data, it is still not happening routinely. This means the evidence base for gendered disaster risks and impacts is too often dependent on the qualitative and the anecdotal, which carry less force with decision makers. However, despite this relative deficiency, there are sound arguments in favour of the proper engendering of DRR on both rights-based grounds as well as simple effectiveness. While the heterogeneity inherent in the global scale requires context-specific actions, there are nevertheless many broad, generic issues which are transferable, and should be applied, when the development windows of opportunity open in disasters. Marion Pratt and Sezin Tokar refer, in their comment, to the role for donors to reinforce the gender argument in their guidance and funding criteria; they also highlight the institutional problem faced by aid organizations with high staff turnovers. It leaves us with the question of how to ensure a gendered institutional memory and long-term commitment.

The second article, which straddles the global and the regional, offers one way of supporting institutional memory through the use of the World Wide Web. Kristinne Sanz *et al.* describe the online educational initiative of the Gender and Disaster Network (GDN), which is an open space for the exchange of knowledge, information, and views aimed at ensuring that gender is integrated fully within disaster matters. While the reach of the Internet has become very wide, the article acknowledges that this technology can be exclusive as well as inclusive, and so seeks to expand its activity through collaborations with others at a range of scales. The inclusion of the examples from small island developing states (SIDS) demonstrates how each example focuses on the specifics of the local country, yet at the same time reveals the commonality of themes in this *RDD* issue. For example, it laments the failure to recognize and compensate the loss in disasters of women's economic activity, even though Goal 1 of the MDGs specifically includes women to realize full and productive employment. However, the evidence from this, as with other regions, is not all negative and there are also examples of the challenging of gender stereotypes; the development of "joined up thinking"; and the linking of DRR with food and agriculture through a proper consideration of gender.

Elaine Enarson's comment points to the long journey to see the knowledge and tools documented by GDN applied and implemented where it matters most: on the ground. She points to ways of achieving this through, as one example shows, collaborative initiatives with those working on a range of social justice issues but with whom there is, as yet, no common language or sharing.

The next article draws important links between scales and themes. Shoichi Ando's article describes the work of the United Nations Centre for Regional Development (UNCRD) across global-UN, regional, and community levels. Operating from both the top down and the bottom up, the Centre attempts to link disaster and development, and keeps achievement of the MDGs in focus. Programmes and projects have revealed the complex causes of disaster vulnerability, but they also disclose the strong correlation be-

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tween risk exposure and marginalization of certain social groups — women in particular. Taking a community focus and supporting/creating inclusive stakeholder groups are risk reduction methods that UNCRD has adopted. Like others, UNCRD has found that while gender may be seen as a cross-cutting issue, it is often absent or minimally represented. Rajib Shaw's comment emphasizes the important contribution made by UNCRD in linking policy to practical actions: promoting sustainable development through gender-sensitive DRR requires both.

Yoko Saito develops the UNCRD themes in her article, which observes how "participation" and "community" are often misapplied terms: participation is the word used where actually top-down consultation is the reality, and there is a lack of recognition of diversity within communities. She makes the important point that even within community-based disaster management (CBDM), women may still be relatively invisible and lack opportunities to engage actively in decision making. Yet women's participation in decision making is a question of good governance and crucial for long-term sustainable growth at the regional level and beyond.

Lesley Abdela's comments and further observations provide more reinforcement for some points raised elsewhere. For example, the need to bridge the gender gap between different actors; where disaster experts often understand disasters but not gender, and gender experts often understand gender but not disasters. She reports on an initiative in Nepal by a GenCap<sup>3/</sup> Senior Gender Adviser to bring people working on disasters and people working on gender together in workshops to aid understanding.

Brenda D. Phillips's article gives us a perspective from a developed world context. Here she echoes other articles when she refers to the value of inter-organizational networking and information exchange for facilitating understanding after Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast of the USA in 2005. She points to the important precursor work carried out over many years in putting gender concerns in front of the disaster management community, which benefited those caught up in Katrina's wake. Another example echoes others of this issue's findings; that gender is not just about women. While reporting on the many impacts on women, she also notes that in New Orleans it was African-American men who died in greater numbers. She, too, shows how gender intersects with age, ethnicity, disability, and other social categories, and that to deal with gendered risk we must first deal with underlying and interconnected social problems.

Viewing the USA from the perspective of Africa, Stuart Katwikirize notes, among other things, how democratic governance and high literacy rates, compared with many parts of the world, have played a major role in supporting women's civil rights and aiding their active presence in disaster response. Yet numerous challenges remain and various failings were evident in the response to Hurricane Katrina, despite the enormous resources available to the country. As he points out, even in North America, gendered disaster risks are real.

Taking another developed country view, Yukiko Takeuchi and Rajib Shaw present work from Japan where, despite being theoretically cushioned from disaster by greater economic resources, more than 6,400 people died in the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake in 1995. Many of these deaths were of older women. However, in the Hiroshima City case study, older men and children were the main fatalities. While the case studies confirm the importance of identifying and mitigating hazardous locations, they also show that isolation from social networks was a major factor. The authors note the counterproductive

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impact of the recurrent stress on women's vulnerability and the way it points to deeply embedded gender inequalities.

Manori Gunatilleke's comment on this article includes a useful report on the way the nongovernmental organization (NGO), Oxfam, working with other groups in Sri Lanka, Guinea, Sierra Leone, and elsewhere, have ensured that the practical and strategic needs of women are included in humanitarian interventions. For example, working through existing groups who have local knowledge and the trust of local community members means they can provide appropriate information for timely decision making. Engaging men in the task also challenges unequal roles and relationships.

Several authors refer to violence against women in the aftermath of disasters. Rosalind Houghton's article focuses entirely on this topic. As with other articles on other countries, this one shows that New Zealand lacks the institutional structures for dealing with domestic violence in disasters. Those who plan for disasters do not plan for violence issues; and those who work on domestic violence issues do not plan for disasters. Robyn Betts notes a polarization between dominant command and control models of disaster management and feminist theories underpinning women's health programming, which can partly explain why the two systems of thought do not coincide. However, as Lesley Abdela also points out in connection with an earlier article, everyone should take responsibility for preventing and addressing sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). In reality, however, as Betts observes, disaster management policy is more likely to prioritize ethnicity, disability, and ageing over factors of gender.

The article by Chaman Pincha and N. Hari Krishna discusses the largely un-researched subject of the disbursement of *ex gratia* payments following disasters and, in doing so, highlights the issues around rights and needs-based approaches. As part of their discussion, Pincha and Krishna raise the question of responsibility for disasters but more particularly, the "disaster after the disaster". It has been said before that the real problems actually begin for people after a disaster has occurred, when failures in disaster management create unnecessary or unplanned-for difficulties.<sup>41</sup> The misuse of *ex gratia* payments here represent a "policy-induced disaster" with wide-ranging implications and impacts. Once again, we see the negative impacts arising from the enforcement of stereotypical roles and expectations. This case study reports the abuse of women's reproductive rights; that is, when they come under extreme pressure to reverse sterilizations in order to replace children lost in the tsunami, or when forced into early marriages. Failure to recognize social groupings beyond simple male-female stereotypes mean that many people — in this case people identifying as Aravanis or transgender — are under-served in disasters. This is of course a gender issue and underlines just how often we equate a gender perspective with the rights and needs of "women" only. Inclusion of men is paramount if we are to see real social change (for example, through the sensitization of men and boys to the sharing of household responsibilities, and the understanding of emotional impacts on men when disasters take away their traditional breadwinner roles), and for GDRR to be truly gendered and not just feminized. Although the subject of the article is narrowly focused, the lessons which come out of its analysis have much wider application and, as Anna Dimitrijevic points out, could be usefully applied to the policy implementation of the MDGs and *HFA*.

We tend to view disasters as singular and extraordinary events, but the article by Nibedita S. Ray-Bennett teases out the intersections and multiplicities that emerge when



we understand disasters in their historical perspective and through the lens of intersecting axes of vulnerability. It shows how misleading it is to focus on one social dimension at a time — in the present context: gender — without a corresponding understanding of class, caste, and other social signifiers. Without this kind of multi-layered approach and even understanding of how vulnerabilities are socially constructed, we cannot truly achieve DRR; that is, linking disaster risk to development practice to meet the MDGs related to poverty reduction and environmental sustainability. As Supriya Akerkar remarks in her comments, we will meet, at best, some short-term, response-based, practical needs and not the longer-term, more fundamentally development-based, strategic gender interests. These strategic gender interests necessitate social protection systems that are transformative and not just instrumental; but, currently, this remains a distant goal.

We are still locked into a way of thinking which regards disasters as extraordinary interruptions to the linear process of development rather than, as Sarah Bradshaw points out, symptomatic of underdevelopment. Even the highest levels of policy setting have failed to deliver “joined up” thinking, as is evident in the lack of disaster considerations within the MDGs. However, she argues, that perhaps we need to step back further and subject our gender orthodoxies to critical appraisal. This final article raises a major issue of evidence — or the lack of it. We have heard already that the general lack of sex/gender disaggregated data<sup>5/</sup> leaves us without statistical verification of the scale of gendered impacts and processes, but the evidence gap also leads to the reinforcement of stereotypical roles for women and girls as homemakers.

The article provides an analysis of various feminization processes which should cause us to reconsider some of our “common sense” understandings and responses to disaster and development demands. Let us consider not just the disaster situations where more women than men have died (a central concern of gender and disaster research, which inadvertently reinforces notions of female vulnerability), but men’s risk-taking behaviour which can lead to excessive male deaths. Furthermore, while women’s risk averse behaviour is often lauded in comparison,<sup>6/</sup> this article argues that extreme risk aversion can be treacherous when it renders women helpless to save themselves. How then do we make sense of apparently contradictory cases in the absence of firm data? It is not that the evidence we do have (even the anecdotal) is not trustworthy, but rather that the interpretations we put upon it and the uses we make of it must be subject to reflection and gender analysis. The article demonstrates an instrumentalist use of women as delivery agents for the more efficient and effective delivery of post-disaster resources to households and families. This feminization process puts women “at the service of, rather than served by, reconstruction”.

Thus, as Cheryl L. Anderson’s comment on the article points out, simplistic gendered approaches in post-disaster recovery may not result in gender equality. The status of men and women is rarely equal and disaster programmes may simply recover to the same state.

### **Gendering Disaster Risk Reduction: How Is It To Be Achieved?**

While the task before us is stated as gendering DRR, we must pause now to reflect on the fact that it is already gendered. It is gendered but in a way that systematically excludes women and girls who are hidden behind a screen, which universalizes the situation of men. This is particularly evident in the continued use of the term “man” (especially “man-made

disasters” in the present context) when both sexes are intended.

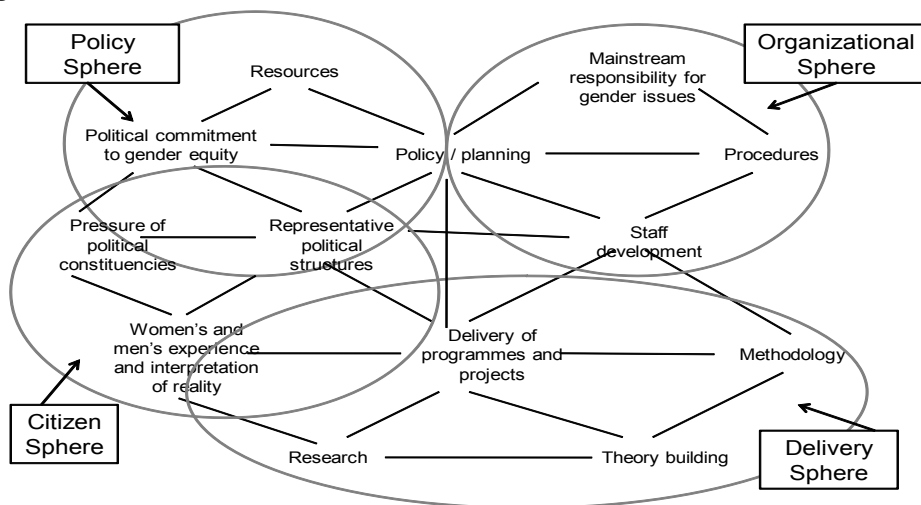
What emerges from the articles presented here is both simple and complex. It is simple in its demand for equality; it is complex in the way it must be achieved in so many and so varied social, political, and cultural contexts. Yet, despite the heterogeneity of the many examples, we can see that there are also many shared themes. I want to discuss just one of these to end this Editorial Introduction: the problem of the institutionalization of gender into DRR. How do we bring about change and how do we sustain it? How do we ensure gendered institutional memory and long-term commitment?

A discussion of institutionalization comprises two elements: one is concerned with what might be considered “technical” issues of process; and the other has to do with power. These are now addressed in turn.

### Technical Aspects of Institutionalization

How do we achieve GDRR? How can we measure the extent to which it is happening? A useful organizing framework for the more technical issues of gender institutionalization is Caren Levy’s “web of institutionalisation” (see figure 1). This apparently complex diagram shows thirteen intersecting elements that together must be considered if the institutionalization of gender is to occur and to be sustained. In simpler terms, successful assimilation cannot be achieved by one person, by one organization, or by operating in a single sphere. Levy suggests four broad areas of activity (in no particular order): the policy sphere; the organizational sphere; the delivery sphere; and the citizen sphere.

Figure 1. The Web of Institutionalisation



**Source:** Adaptation from the original work by Caren Levy, and subsequent adaptation by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). See C. Levy, “The Process of Institutionalising Gender in Policy and Planning: The ‘Web’ of Institutionalisation” (Working Paper; no. 74) (Development Planning Unit, University College London, 1996) (Available at <http://eprints.ucl.ac.uk/34/1/wp74.pdf>; accessed 6 June 2009); and UNEP, *Gender Plan of Action* (Final Draft) (August 2006) (Available at <http://www.unep.ch/roe/gender/refdocs/Final%20POA%20for%20UNEP.pdf>; accessed 6 June 2009).

## The Policy Sphere

**Political commitment** is a requirement, but its form can send out different messages. While political rhetoric may place gender on the agenda, it can be phrased in ways that perpetually emphasize the vulnerability of women and girls, and separate them out as “special needs” cases. Political commitment that recognizes equal gender rights sends out a much stronger and more effective message. The translation of political commitment into concrete **policy** is another stage in which institutionalization may be strengthened or undermined. Ghettoizing gender into separate policies and departments or sections is rarely effective on its own. Proper **resourcing** is necessary to effect change, but too often the budget for gender is small and the gender adviser role lacks status, authority or reward. However, **policy planning** may lead to a choice between one or other forms: separate gender policies/roles or mainstreaming.

## The Organizational Sphere

**Mainstreaming** suffers from being nobody’s, but everybody’s, responsibility and ends up in the same situation as cross-cutting issues: everywhere and nowhere. One element on its own will not achieve the goal; mainstreaming must be combined with separate gender initiatives. Proper gendered **procedures** must be recognized as important through **staff development**, and then enforced. As Levy observes:

Considering existing power relations, putting women and men practitioners back into their organisations after gender training, where there is no clear gendered policy framework and/or where the procedures which govern their work on a daily basis are implicitly gender blind or explicitly obstructive to change, is a recipe for wasted training.<sup>7/</sup>

Managers must justify their decisions and actions through an obligatory gender analysis. A gender analysis should be the norm, and not the exception or the luxury, when time allows.<sup>8/</sup> Putting money into gender work (money is a multiple indicator of value) will attract more men through a perceived increase in status.

## The Delivery Sphere

The **delivery of gendered policy, programmes**, and projects must be supported by appropriate methodologies (and these will be different in different contexts), research, and theory building. Without digressing into more detailed abstract discussion, the emphasis here is on concepts and approaches that have some coherence and operate in a mutually reinforcing way. Checklists, indicators, and measurements on the one hand, and participatory, inclusive, gender-sensitive research and engagement on the other, imply different methodological approaches. They can be used to support gender inclusion on efficiency grounds or on rights-based terms, respectively. Although they might be used together, they suggest different ways of engaging with people and ideas, and they could result in different degrees and forms of gender institutionalization.

## The Citizen Sphere

Finally, the elements within the citizen sphere take account of citizens’ agency and rights to representation on their own terms (rather than paternalistic notions of speaking and acting on the other’s behalf). They include **women’s and men’s experience and interpretation of reality**. This entails the need to understand gender roles, gendered access to

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resources, and gendered needs and interests. However, to achieve change then it is necessary to form or work collectively with appropriate **political constituencies**, and engage with formal, **representative political structures**.

### **Sites of Power**

Each of the main spheres of action and the individual elements represent sites of power. This means we cannot just consider the technical aspects of institutionalization but must also consider the underlying social structures which operate at seemingly abstract and distant levels, but whose effects are felt in tangible and material ways by women and men. If the technical aspects are concerned with the “how” question, then the power aspects are concerned with the “why” question. Why is gender not institutionalized (in DRR), and then who or what is blocking or resisting change?

### **What Do We Mean By Gender?**

Finally, we end with a question that is asked too rarely, but unless we consider it carefully, we will replace one form of discrimination with another. What do we mean by gender? Too often, it is defined simply as referring to women who are seen as vulnerable victims. Men are rarely considered as a specific group with a range of vulnerabilities and capacities. While the relative invisibility of women and girls from disaster-related concerns has been the justification for their positive selection for attention, at the minimum, gender must refer to social relations between women and men in order to understand the power differentials operating. Furthermore, we need to recognize that women (like men) are not a homogeneous group. We cannot have a simple checklist approach that merely calls for equal numbers of women and men in a given setting without ensuring representativeness within the gender group. We cannot assume that putting more women in positions of power and authority will necessarily advance gender rights; but neither can we presuppose that men cannot support the rights of women and girls.

In no region of the world do women and men have equal social, economic, and legal rights,<sup>9/</sup> and so the assurance of truly gender-inclusive DRR is clearly a major task. However, we need to go still further. While parts of the academy may have acknowledged the limitations of describing sex or gender in simple binary terms, DRR policy and practice has yet to engage with this level of sophistication. Slowly, in some places, there is recognition of transgender groups<sup>10/</sup> and their specific needs and interests in disasters. Yet often this refers to the latter sub-group of a wider LGBT grouping: lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender. The almost exclusive focus on transgender — while still a radical departure from the usual identity homogeneity — depends often (not always) on a relatively safe, biological definition, which is essentially de-politicized. The inclusion of the wider space of sexualities (in the plural) is much more challenging because it is deeply, culturally context specific — not least because of issues of illegality in many countries.

There is no single way to answer our many questions and no single route to our objective. We have much work to do on developing rights-based DRR policy and practice, which is truly inclusive and engendered in the widest sense. However, we can see in this *RDD* issue that we have achieved much and have begun the task of establishing the roadmap to get us, collectively, to our destination.

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## NOTES

- 1/ See Millennium Development Goals (Available at <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>; accessed 6 June 2009); and *Hyogo Framework for Action* (Available at <http://www.unisdr.org/eng/hfa/hfa.htm>; accessed 6 June 2009).
- 2/ For the full list of goals, targets, and indicators, see “About the MDGs: Basics” (Available at <http://www.undp.org/mdg/basics.shtml>; accessed 15 July 2009).
- 3/ The IASC Gender Sub-working Group, GenCap, is an initiative carried out in coordination with the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC). It is a pool of senior gender advisers who can be deployed at short notice to support UN humanitarian agencies in humanitarian emergencies. GenCap helps build the capacity of humanitarian actors at the country level to mainstream gender in all sectors of humanitarian response.
- 4/ A. Oliver-Smith, “Peru’s Five Hundred Year Earthquake: Vulnerability in Historical Context” in A. Varley, ed., *Disasters, Development and Environment* (Chichester: Wiley, 1994), pp. 31-48.
- 5/ For a recent discussion of statistical evidence, see Eric Neumayer and Thomas Plümper, “The Gendered Nature of Natural Disasters: The Impact of Catastrophic Events on the Gender Gap in Life Expectancy,” *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* 97 (3):551-66.
- 6/ S. Cutter, “The Forgotten Casualties: Women, Children, and Environmental Change,” *Global Environmental Change* 5 (3:1995):181-94; and A. Alice Fothergill, “Gender, Risk, and Disaster,” *International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters* 14 (1:1996):33-56.
- 7/ Caren Levy, “The Process of Institutionalising Gender in Policy and Planning: The ‘Web’ of Institutionalisation” (Working Paper, no. 74) (Development Planning Unit, University College, London, 1996), p. 9.
- 8/ United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), *Gender Plan of Action* (Final Draft) (August 2006).
- 9/ International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), *Engendering Development: Through Gender Equality in Rights, Resources, and Voice* (New York: World Bank and Oxford University Press, 2001).
- 10/ See Pincha and Krishna in this issue.