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ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT AND NATURAL DISASTERS
MITIGATION: MIDDLE EASTERN
GENDER PERSPECTIVE

Prepared by
Samia Galal Saad, Ph.D. *

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**ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT AND NATURAL DISASTERS MITIGATION:
MIDDLE EASTERN**

Prolonged dry seasons due to climate change created a great loss of the forest and the natural green cover in addition to the tree cutting to agriculture development and urban settlements as currently practiced in Syria, Lebanon and Morocco. This loss of green cover has led to noticeable desertification and loss of fertile soil to the sea and rivers increasing the impacts of floods created by the rainy season.

Dry weather also increases forest fires with losses in human properties as well as biodiversity. The loss of green cover also enhances the rainwater velocity leading to severe flood flushing power with more destruction, loss of property and land fertility. Desertification also impacts on livestock raising reducing the economic asset women usually depend upon in needy days.

Earthquakes are also known in the region and their implications are very severe as the building and planning codes did not integrate this type of natural disasters since they are not very frequent and tend to be forgotten. Tornados and typhoons are not common in the region as the climate tends to be more settled with little variability throughout the year. Volcanoes are not recorded.

Natural disasters managing councils are present in some countries of the region but their role

the Internet and telecommunication technologies which suits their secluded culture and traditions. Saudi women are now participating in postgraduate, graduate and undergraduate female education at the female segregated universities. They are also handling services;

new technology development integrates conservative energy, water, and raw materials consumption.

Currently Middle East women's knowledge of sustainable styles of life is increasing due to their more education and exposure to the outer world through the variable mass media channels. Information dissemination by television, Internet, and radios facilitated the transfer of massive information to women under any cultural or social barriers. Increasing the number of women having access to television and radio helped most of the illiterate women to learn new ideas on how to conserve water resources, ensure food security and clean energy sources and to gain new skills for income generation to alleviate their poverty. Yet there is still a dire need to secure those resources for many women in the region especially with the increasing economic sanctions, wars and increasing population and urbanization,

- Lack of information dissemination regarding the areas vulnerable to natural disasters is one of the basic causes behind increasing their economic and socio-economic impacts.
- Community members are not informed with the proper preparedness actions they should adopt in case of disasters.
- Women are even less informed about natural disasters, and their management or mitigation. Lack of education, less involvement in development and the decision making process at all domains feeds in women usual unawareness of natural disasters places, mitigation, management or preparedness actions
- Lack of allocated budgets, which can be mobilized to face any unexpected disaster and reduce its tolls on men and women in developing countries, more than developed ones. All measures combating disasters physical damages require extra budgets to be invested to integrate those measures in the construction phases of projects. In case of limited countries resources those measures tend to be forgotten or neglected.
- Mass media channels give the least emphasis on mitigation, management and preparedness actions for natural disasters to be adopted by the community. In turn this will limit the access of illiterate women to information even more than men.

Gender issues in preparedness and relief

In the Middle East culture it is shameful for men not to participate actively in controlling the impacts of natural disasters. Women tend to secure their families household assets, which are basic for their survival after the disaster. Men will try to protect their amenities by starting

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Role of governments

Different governmental organizations have important roles in managing natural disasters. Environmental deterioration leading to the occurrence of frequent disasters can be minimized through sustainable development approaches summarized in the following points:

- Adoption of the environmental impact assessment for any new project as a valid legal tool to avoid the impacts of natural disasters.
- Integration of natural resources and environmental management in their policy making through establishing stored water, shelter, and food to be used in case of emergencies hitting certain vulnerable communities.
- Sustainable planning for land use to avoid poor communities use of risky areas as a result of increasing land pricing for safe areas.
- Dedication of risky areas to activities not severely impacted by disasters as forests, green areas and the use of drip irrigation systems to avoid the use of excessive water and enhancement of land sliding.
- Information dissemination regarding the areas of flash floods, sand dunes movement, earthquakes, and land sliding.
- Involving more men and women in the planning and execution of projects related to development, and proper mitigation measures for the devastating impacts of natural disasters.

Role of non-governmental organizations and the civil society

The role of civil society is growing steadily all over the countries of the region. More women are participating in NGOs, as they tend to function away from the cumbersome rules and regulations of the government. Also women can give more to voluntarily work.

Civil society organizations should be empowered by the knowledge of natural disasters management, mitigation and preparedness. Society support for such actions could be deeply rooted and involving to both men and women. Women NGOs can play a very important role in information dissemination to involve more women in disasters preparedness and avoidance measures. They can empower women decision makers to integrate this dimension in their decision-making process as well as lobby for others to support those decisions integrating the environmental dimension in their plans and actions insuring sustainable development.

Through participation in the process of Environmental Impact Assessment public hearings on new development projects, NGOs can pose a pressure to avoid any natural disasters implications by insuring the real integration of mitigation engineering measures to natural disasters implications. NGOs participation in EIAs evaluation can also insure the proper urban planning which avoid risky areas.

The efforts of NGOs can be hindered by lack of information, non-cooperative attitudes of some governmental organizations, as well as lack of resources to disseminate the preparedness information in the society.

Lack of cooperation from the mass media can hinder the NGOs information disseminating roles. In addition reluctance of women to active and positive participation is a great hindrance towards more women information especially in societies where men and women are not actively participating together due to cultural barriers.

Role of international organizations

International UN organizations and donor agencies play a serious key role in empowering women in the region to get involved in several developmental issues and to lead their participating role in sustainable development. Those agencies need to work collaborately in issues like natural disasters management and get this important issue as one of the hot issues to be integrated in all their programs and projects. Although they have raised the awareness about the integration of the gender dimension, yet there is still a lot to be done to integrate both gender and environmental dimensions to insure sustainable development. Sustainable development has to be seen as one of the very mitigating tools to natural disasters.

Conclusions

- Since the old ages, women in the Middle East region have mastered conservation of natural resources and proper management of their environment. Although their role is not properly advocated due to mass media gender bias, yet their role now is getting recognized and more governmental and non-governmental agencies are seeking their participation. Increasing levels of education and involvement in several male dominated professions is increasing their credibility as decision-making partners.
- Women's participation in natural disaster management, mitigation and preparedness is part of proper considerations given by governmental and non-governmental bodies. The different countries of the region give more attention now to natural disasters management, as they tend to be more frequent.
- The role of mass media in giving gender-balanced images about the roles played by different entities in case of disasters is growing and their informative role about preparedness actions is still limited and needs more attention.
- International agencies need to integrate more the natural disaster dimension in their projects and plans implemented in the different countries of the region. Women have to be seriously involved and informed about their needed important role.