



Separated group discussion of women was held in Jenggala Village, Lombok Utara district; women discussed about their vulnerability and capacity to build resilience to flood disaster risk, Building District Resilience Project, 2011. (Yenny Widjaja / Oxfam)

INDONESIA CASE STUDY

Jenggala's women living close to disaster

Oxfam Indonesia has been working with local partner organisation Koslata to change attitudes which leave people vulnerable to disaster and to assist the community of Jenggala with disaster risk reduction (DRR). The aim of DRR activities is to help the community to better prepare for floods and landslides and to reduce the negative impacts of such hazards. The programme has sought to engage women in DRR activities both because women's participation enables them to benefit from DRR activities, manage their livelihoods and reduce food insecurities and because women's exclusion deprives the projects of vital skills, knowledge and capabilities which the women possess.

INTRODUCTION

The village of Jenggala is located in the hilly North Lombok District of West Nusa Tenggara in eastern Indonesia. The main livelihood of the community is rice farming which is supplemented by cultivating bamboo, coffee, corn, coconuts and bananas. Women take primary responsibility for both cultivating the crops and trading them locally. However, these livelihoods are threatened by frequent floods and landslides. Flooding destroys homes, drowns livestock and inundates agricultural land causing crop failure. Landslides cause deluges of mud and uproot trees, which block access routes to hill-top gardens meaning that any crops which survive the floods cannot be harvested before they spoil.

Since 2010 Oxfam Indonesia has been working with local partner organisation Koslata to change attitudes which leave people vulnerable to disaster and to assist the community of Jenggala with disaster risk reduction (DRR). The aim of DRR activities is to help the community to better prepare for floods and landslides and to reduce the negative impacts of such hazards. DRR includes improving the community's knowledge about how to minimise the impact of floods and landslides on life, property and livelihoods; conducting Participatory Capacities and Vulnerability Assessments (PCVA); developing community action plans; and organizing and training village disaster preparedness teams. Central to all these activities is the empowerment of women and the advancement of gender equality.

WOMEN AND DISASTERS

The programme has sought to engage women in DRR activities both because women's participation enables them to benefit from DRR activities, manage their livelihoods and reduce food insecurities and because women's exclusion deprives the projects of vital skills, knowledge and capabilities which the women possess. This is illustrated by these examples:

- In Jenggala it is usually women who labour in remote fields and hill-top gardens. Landslides and floods obstruct access to these remote locations compromising their personal safety and livelihoods. However, this means that women often have a better understanding of where floods and landslides are likely to occur. Men's roles are often organisational or business-related so they are less aware of what happens in the fields.
- Although women are less likely to have access to weather-related early warning systems or be informed about oncoming rains and floods, social networks among women are strong. This means that information can be disseminated in informal ways such as through social gatherings and during conversations with friends and relatives. In this way, essential information about disaster preparedness reaches entire families who may not otherwise have benefited from such knowledge.

- Although gender discrimination frequently excludes women from decision-making about community disaster response, their dominance in the domestic sphere means they have more knowledge than men about the production, preparation and distribution of food. Additionally, their long-standing role as family carers means that they are often very knowledgeable about medical care. This kind of knowledge saves lives in emergency situations.
- Women are also well placed to contribute to disaster recovery as they often have several sources of income away from the farm. Expanding these business opportunities is vital when natural disasters reduce income from agricultural activities.

Promoting women's participation in DRR

Key steps were taken to support women to engage in DRR work in Jenggala, for example, through joining village disaster preparedness teams and women's self-help groups.

- **A stakeholder mapping exercise was conducted.** Oxfam encouraged partner Koslata to map actors in the community that do and don't support women's initiatives. This fed into community discussions.
- **Separate meetings were held for women and men.** This created a space for women to discuss their needs and vulnerabilities without being silenced by men. The differences between men's and women's needs were illuminated and women were able to make their voices heard. In meetings where both men and women were present women were especially encouraged to speak. When their thoughts and ideas were listened to women gained confidence to express their needs in other aspects of daily life.
- **Both men and women were introduced to concepts of gender equality.** Community meetings were used to raise both women's and men's awareness of gender equality issues and women's rights. For example, the groups explored women's and men's different experiences, capacities and vulnerabilities, and the effect these have on disaster preparedness.
- **Quotas were set for women's participation.** A minimum quota of 30 per cent was set for women's participation in all DRR activities, to ensure that women were not excluded from information and knowledge about DRR.
- **Women were actively encouraged and supported to participate in activities.** Women learned about different DRR activities during community meetings, and came to appreciate their own knowledge and capacity. This realisation that they have a role to play in DRR, and a corresponding growth in self-confidence, encouraged them to get involved. They also discussed barriers to participation, and gained support from each other to overcome these. Women who got involved in activities at an early stage acted as positive role models, and were encouraged to share information with other women.

- **Women were educated about early warning signs of disaster and how to respond appropriately.** This has facilitated women's independent reactions to climate-related hazards, reduced their reliance on men and strengthened women's belief in their own capabilities. As women gained better knowledge about disasters, men had greater respect for women's contribution to DRR activities.
- **Capacity building on leadership skills was targeted at women.** Women were supported to take on leadership positions and others' recognition of women's capacity to fulfil these roles has improved. This has empowered women to engage in other civil society activities in Jenggala. The inclusion of women in the management of DRR activities creates a more accessible channel for other women in the village to express their concerns and needs.
- **Influential men were targeted to gain their support.** Koslata identified influential men in the community and approached them to gain their support to ensure the 30 per cent quota for women's participation was met. They took time to explain why women's participation was necessary.

Preparing to Respond to Disasters

Women in Jenggala have been enthusiastic about participating in and leading DRR activities. They have shown great interest in acquiring information about disaster preparedness and consider this knowledge to be very important. In joining village disaster preparedness teams, they identified how their skills can be used and why their contribution is important. Their active engagement in such activities counteracts the assumption that women are too busy to engage in extra work and training.

Sabarni is a housewife who volunteered to be a member of the village disaster preparedness team. If a disaster occurs, she will work in the field kitchen preparing food for those displaced from their homes by floods and landslides. Her responsibilities include collecting food during the onset of a disaster, preparing the food hygienically so as to limit the spread of disease, and, most importantly, monitoring food supplies during the immediate recovery period.

Sabarni also took the initiative to motivate her friends and neighbours to prepare for possible disasters. Some were inspired to attend first aid courses so they can assist in disaster response. Others were motivated to plant trees in the hills near their farms so as to reduce the risk of landslides occurring. By initiating discussions about disaster preparedness in informal settings, Sabarni educates those in the village who would not otherwise have access to such knowledge and information. Her social networks provide valuable channels of communication among villagers.

Sabarni and other team members have also attended simulations of disaster situations at the Jenggala administration offices. This gave them the opportunity to practice their responses. Although the village disaster preparedness team has not yet been called into action, Sabarni knows how she must act when the next floods or landslides come.

In the aftermath of a disaster, the whole village will rely on the skills and knowledge of the women of Jenggala for the distribution of food and medical care. By recognising women's important role in disaster response, both men and women in Jenggala increasingly value women's work. It is the competence of women such as Sabarni who will ensure the survival of disaster affected people and reduce the losses incurred by the whole village.

However, despite these efforts, women do not enjoy equal access to DRR activities. Those in certain positions in society are more able to attend meetings, assume leadership roles, participate in disaster simulations and trainings, or join village disaster preparedness teams. Conditions which facilitate women's involvement include:

1. Prior membership of a community group, such as the natural bamboo crafts group, women's business group or forest farmers group.
2. A source of income independent to that of her husband, such as employment as an Integrated Health Service cadre.
3. Familial ties to local community leaders or those who hold a position in the village governance structure.
4. A husband who has a more stable source of income, such as owning land or working as a civil servant.

Courage is needed for women to be successful in securing their right to be heard and to participate in and benefit from DRR activities. Even when women join in with activities, they often still face resistance to their participation. It is essential that they are supported by local organisations and that they motivate each other to improve their knowledge of DRR, to attend meetings and to keep moving forwards to become leaders of change.

Continued group discussions among women to share their experiences was an important means of maintaining their motivation, as was providing information about women's rights. In addition, Oxfam encouraged Koslata to nominate a gender focal person, to take on responsibility for sharing information about gender equality, and to provide support to women's initiatives.

Recovering livelihoods after disasters

While the men of Jenggala have tended to see the destruction of their crops as the end of their agricultural commitments and therefore a reason to stay at home, the women have been innovative and sought alternative forms of income.

Several women's self-help groups have been established to support women in these enterprises. By generating an income from a source which is less vulnerable to destruction by weather-related disasters, awareness in the village has been raised of women's power to support the village economically in the aftermath of a disaster.

Enterprises which have been particularly successful include bamboo handicrafts, coffee grinding and making dried banana chips. Processing

raw products into marketable goods increases their value. By working together the women have increased bargaining power with wholesalers and markets to receive a better price for their products. Additionally, in times of crop failure members can take small loans from the women's groups in order to buy new seeds or to use as working capital. The enterprises and access to credit supported by these groups are particularly important for small scale farmers whose entire agricultural livelihoods can be quickly destroyed by natural disasters.

Mrs Mardi is the head of one such women's business group. She and the other women in the group are responsible for organising and managing production and distribution activities as well as finances. The women's organisational skills are vital in the immediate response to disasters while their entrepreneurship and innovation are essential in helping the community to meet its economic needs after destructions of crops by floods and landslides.

The success of the group has demonstrated to women and men in the village that they already have the skills necessary to successfully take leadership positions in village disaster preparedness teams and other civil society organisations. These groups provide a space where women can articulate and act on their own needs in relation to disaster recovery. By supporting each other, women can independently address their own vulnerability to disasters and can contribute to the economic resilience of their families.

Challenges to women's effective participation in DRR

Although women's involvement in activities has begun to gradually shift attitudes about women's capabilities, they still face a number of constraints to full participation. For example:

- Many men in the village are not supportive of women's participation in DRR because it is seen to change the status of women in the local community's social system. This means that women were often not invited to or were purposefully excluded from meetings. Women noted that despite this, they do want to attend the meetings.
- Men consider women to be less intellectually and physically able than men to take on leadership roles, make important decisions or even understand the issues around DRR. When women tried to respond to these challenges by asking their husbands to convey messages to meetings, their comments were rarely passed on; the power of knowledge lies in the hands of the men.
- There is an assumption that women lack agency and therefore do not need to know about disaster preparedness. As in everyday life in Jenggala, women are expected to follow their husband's directions following a disaster.
- Women assume the 'double-burden' of work, being responsible for income-generation and domestic duties. This is used as an excuse to legitimise men's exclusion of women from DRR activities.

Discrimination against women is particularly prevalent in the attitudes of community figureheads, husbands, other members of village disaster preparedness teams, and local and national government officials.

However, the women of Jenggala have found support from a number of other sources in their community including the village head, their parents, members of women's groups and some male heads of village disaster preparedness teams. The approach of actively seeking to engage men with strategic positions in the village has helped to create this small, but crucial, support network, and identify those men who do want to listen to women's voices. Similarly, having quotas for women's participation has ensured that women do have the opportunity to participate at some level.

CONCLUSION

The women of Jenggala village have had to contend with various forms of gender inequality in order to improve the success of DRR activities. In negotiating with the holders of authority and power, such as husbands, community leaders, and traditional social institutions, the women faced many challenges. Some of these were overcome, some continue to reduce the effectiveness of the village's disaster risk reduction activities and prevent women's participation.

Success has been seen in women's ability to gain control over their livelihoods and increase their assets. By engaging in activities which generate and diversify income sources, household vulnerability to disaster-induced loss of livelihoods was reduced. Additionally, the knowledge and skills the women learnt through participating in DRR meetings and training will be vital if, or when, a disaster next occurs in Jenggala. The empowerment women achieved through these activities better enables them to contribute to the future disaster resilience of their village. This has also led to incremental positive shifts in men's attitudes towards women and the importance of their role in village DRR is increasingly recognised, although it is still early days and it will take time to achieve a fundamental shift in gender relations.

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For further information on the issues raised in this paper please e-mail policyandpractice@oxfam.org.uk.

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