START NETWORK

Caritas INDIA
The Joy of Service...

SHE-LEADS

STRENGTHENING WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP & PARTICIPATION IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION & DRR

SUMMARY REPORT

Technical & Knowledge Partner

CHANGE ALLIANCE
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Empowering Women Resilience

The aftermath of disasters, as witnessed in events like the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami, accentuates gender disparities, leaving women with mortality rates 14 times higher than men. Ongoing systemic imbalances, encompassing caregiving responsibilities and restricted decision-making, heighten vulnerabilities, confining women to high-risk zones. Addressing these gender-specific challenges is pivotal for constructing resilient communities, dismantling detrimental feedback cycles, and empowering women to confront forthcoming shocks effectively. A meticulous examination of gender dimensions in disaster risk reduction proves indispensable for crafting effective policies, and recognizing women as proactive contributors. Despite advancements in global and national gender equality and DRR frameworks, a noteworthy gap persists in their systematic implementation, particularly in vulnerable Indian states. Prioritizing women's involvement in decision-making, planning, and resource allocation emerges as a critical imperative for effective disaster risk reduction. Understanding this urgency in formulating and executing more inclusive, just, and equitable DRR processes that incorporate a gender perspective, safeguarding the autonomy of women and girls to bolster overall household resilience, **Caritas India**, with support from **START FUND,** conducted a study on "**Women Inclusive DRR Governance**" in disaster-prone states of Assam, Bihar, Odisha, and West Bengal, focusing on assessing women's roles in decision-making and DRR program implementation.

Women's Empowerment as a Key to Achieving SDGs

Advancing gender equality and empowering women, ensuring their full and effective participation in decision-making processes and reducing gender disparities in disaster impacts.

Reducing gender-based inequalities, by ensuring vulnerable groups, particularly women, have equal access to resources, decision-making processes, and opportunities during and after disasters.

Emphasizes collaboration between governments, organizations, and communities to jointly address disaster risks, leveraging diverse perspectives, and promoting collective action for effective and sustainable solutions.

Scope of the Study

This study explores the underrepresentation of women in Disaster Governance and its impact on their vulnerability during natural hazards. Focused on intersectional challenges, including those faced by marginalized communities, it aims to advocate for women's empowerment in decision-making to shape gender-sensitive policies for effective disaster management. The study covers Assam, Bihar, Odisha, and West Bengal, considering their diverse exposure and coping capacities to climate and disaster risks, aiming to provide insights into socio-economic and cultural factors influencing women's decision-making for disaster resilience. Backed by technical support from Change Alliance, the study aims to create an action framework for effective Emergency response and DRR initiatives with a focus on women, promoting peer learning and feedback within the humanitarian network.

Objectives

1. Generate a comprehensive report assessing women's representation, DRR governance practices, perspectives, and barriers in hazard-prone areas of India.
2. Develop a framework for "Women Inclusive DRR Governance" to enhance local resilience building.
3. Prepare an action plan for gender-responsive DRR and humanitarian response initiatives by various stakeholders.

Steps to Framework creation

Themes of Inquiry

The study delves into the status of women's inclusion in Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) governance through a comprehensive exploration of four key themes: safe and meaningful participation, leadership and capacity building, influence and engagement, and partnership and funding. These thematic inquiries serve as crucial lenses through which the study illuminates the intricate facets of women's roles in DRR governance, offering key insights into the actual status. They unveil the challenges, opportunities, and varying degrees of women's engagement, providing a nuanced understanding essential for informed decision-making and targeted interventions in disaster resilience initiatives..

Safe & Meaningful Participation

- Examine women's participation across disaster platforms at different administrative levels.
- Assess women's involvement in recovery planning, risk assessments, and their representation in teams, while gauging safety and active participation perceptions.

Leadership & Capacity Building

- Assess women's representation in leadership roles in disaster and climate forums.
- Identify forums with women in leadership, their duration, and perceived recognition of capacities.
- Explore barriers, rank settings of women's influence, and assess their engagement in resilience activities.

Influence & Engagement

- Assess women's impact on national disaster and climate policies, strategies, and plans.
- Evaluate alignment with women's priorities, and gauge influence on gender-responsive actions by women-led organizations.

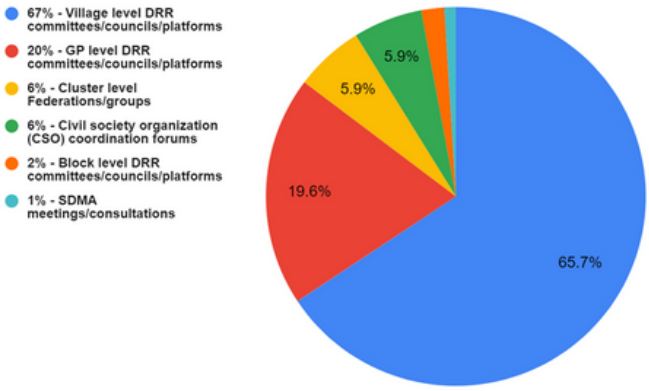
Partnership & Funding

- Evaluate women's participation in deciding the focus of resilience activities.
- Assess women's involvement in co-design, implementation, and evaluation of projects.
- Examine funding allocation for women's leadership within organizations
- Investigate funding received for women's leadership activities within organizations.

Unlocking Insights

Theme 1: Safe & Meaningful participation

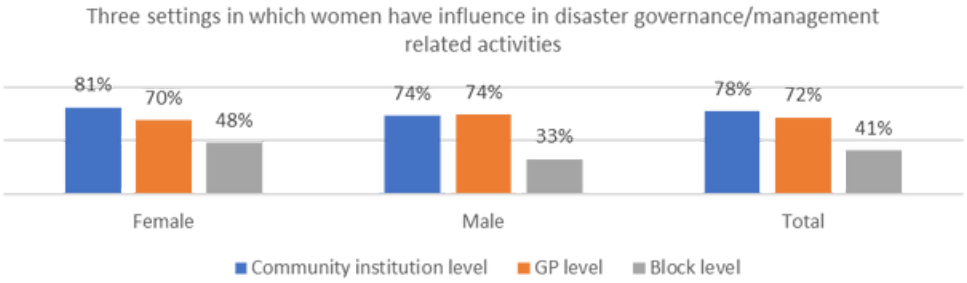
- **Low Overall Women's Participation:** Participation in DRR governance and meetings ranges from 29-49%, with higher representation (67%) at the village level but a significant gap at block and state levels.
- **State-wise Disparities:** Assam and Odisha exhibit better female representation (25-49%), while Bihar has teams with less than 25% women, and West Bengal has the highest percentage of such teams.
- **Active Participation:** Despite 82.6% agreeing that women can contribute actively, cultural hesitancy and lack of knowledge often limit their expression of capabilities.
- **Safety of Participation:** While 86% believe women find it safer to participate, only 48% think physical barriers are actively addressed, emphasizing the need for logistical and financial support to enhance women's engagement and overcome state disparities.



Theme 2: Leadership & Capacity Building

- **Limited Leadership Opportunities:** 55% agreed that leadership positions are held by women however these mainly stand at Village task force levels only or DRR village meetings. Higher women leadership reported in Odisha and Assam compared to Bihar and West Bengal. As in states, men outnumber women, attention is needed to address disparities in leadership roles, especially at higher administrative levels.
- **Community Participation Challenges:** Women face challenges in rising to leadership roles at higher levels (GP/Block/Cluster) due to limited capacity building and awareness.
- **Barriers to Women's Leadership:** 55% agree there are some barriers, highlighting the need for targeted interventions to remove obstacles. Specific challenges include unrecognized expertise (25%), limited funding (23%), discomfort in expressing in male-dominated forums (17%), and lack of participation invitations (14%).
- **Engagement in DRR Activities:** There is a need to focus on activities where women are less engaged mainly Risk assessment, hazard mapping, and vulnerabilities assessment which leads to a key gap in bringing forth their gender-specific needs, interests, and risks in making interventions more gender-responsive.
- **Challenges in Women's Engagement:** Addressing challenges reported by women such as safety in movement (57%), being prevented from having a voice (55%), and ensuring physical barriers are actively addressed such as lack of education and knowledge, transportation, engagement in agricultural activities (48.7%).

Theme 3: Influence & Engagement

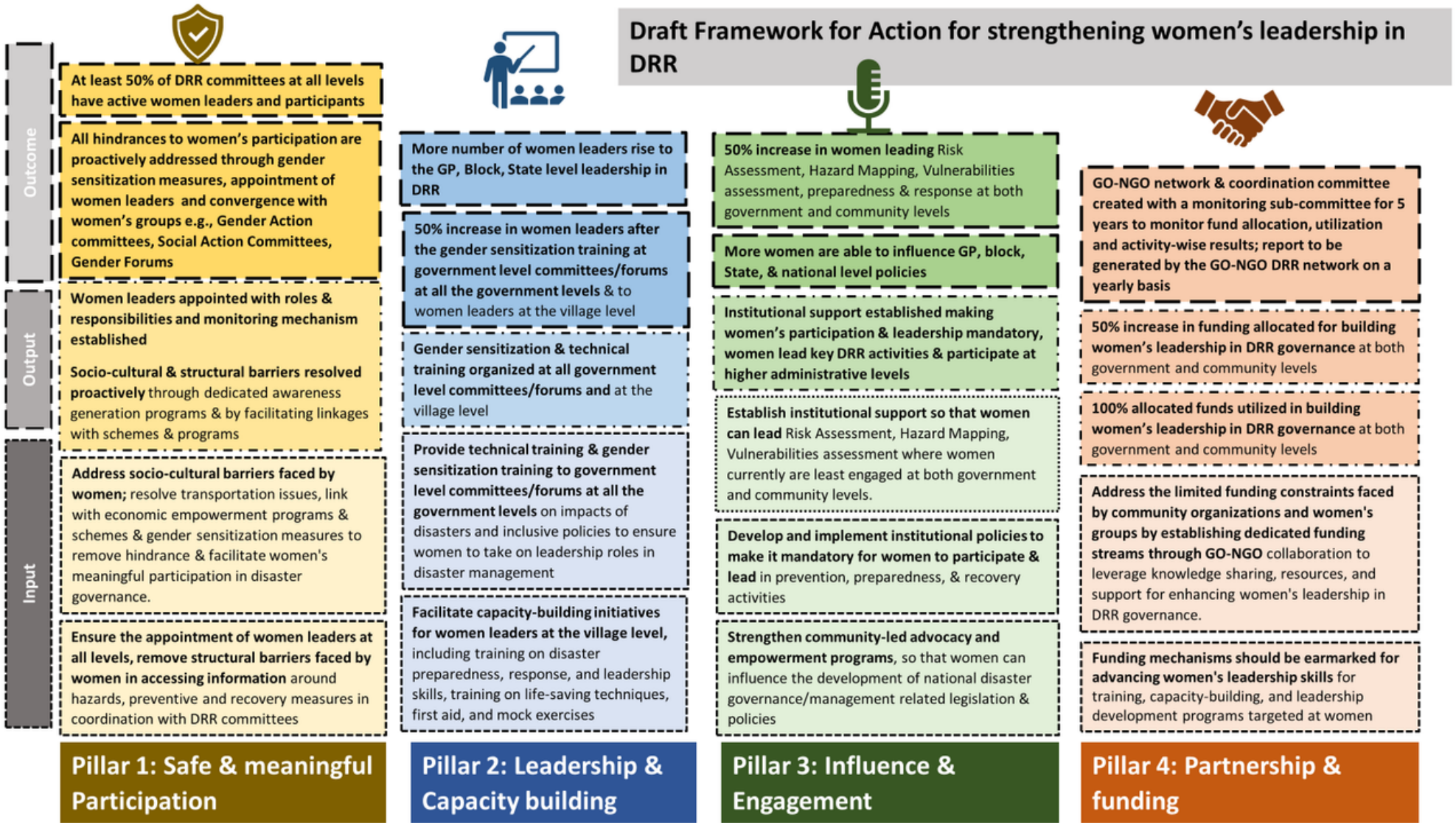


- **Inclusion in Decision Making:** A majority (27%) express uncertainty or believe women's inclusion in disaster governance decision-making and projects with government institutions is not assured, with 39% feeling inclusion has happened at times, mainly for representation purposes.
- **Regional Disparities in Influence:** Only 28% of women report influencing national disaster governance legislation, with higher agreement percentages in Assam and Odisha at the village administration level, indicating regional differences.
- **Policy Reflecting Gender Perspectives:** While 61.2% believe women's views are included in disaster governance programs for gender equality, state-wise variations suggest differing satisfaction levels. Assam and Odisha show higher confidence in policy reflecting women's needs.
- **Gender Responsive Activities:** Around 36-41% note women's active inclusion in designing, implementing, and evaluating disaster programs, with higher agreement percentages in Assam, Bihar, and Odisha regarding gender-responsive prevention and preparedness activities.

Theme 3: Partnership & Funding

- **Limited Funding Allocation:** 68% of respondents disagree that their location/ organizations allocate funding for women's leadership in DRR.
- **Scarce Funding Receipt:** While notable regional disparities exists, 71% disagree that their villages/ organizations receive funding for women's leadership activities in DRR.
- **Uncertainty and Knowledge Gap:** Noteworthy percentages express uncertainty and lack of awareness for tapping into funding sources for women's leadership in DRR.

Framework for Action



Recommendations

- Create **specific funding channels** for women's leadership programs in DRR governance by government and NGOs.
- Establish **collaboration mechanisms for financial support** from the government, NGOs, and corporation
- **Formalize partnerships with women's organizations** for active involvement in decision-making and project implementation.
- Foster **networking among community organizations, NGOs, and women-led groups for mutual support.**
- Expand **training on gender-specific impacts and inclusive policies** for women in DRR governance.
- Develop and implement **training programs focusing on women's leadership** in disaster management at all levels.
- Develop **institutional support and comprehensive training** for women's leadership aligned with **community-led advocacy efforts.**
- Integrate **gender equality principles** into DRR policies and initiatives.
- Prioritize **gender balance in decision-making** within community organizations.
- Conduct awareness campaigns on the importance of women's leadership in DRR governance.
- Establish **mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating initiatives promoting women's leadership.**
- Implement **grassroots monitoring mechanisms** for progress tracking in women's leadership initiatives.