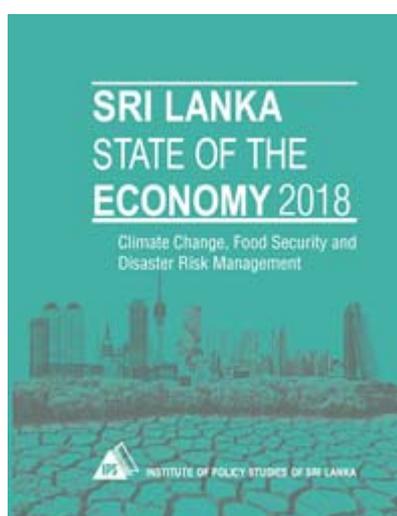




# GENDER DIMENSION OF DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT

*From the IPS flagship publication 'Sri Lanka: State of the Economy 2018 Report'*



When it comes to deaths, gender differences are directly linked to women's economic and social rights. In societies where women and men enjoyed equal rights, disasters caused the same number of deaths in both sexes, and discrepancies are the result of existing inequalities. For example, the latter include where boys were given preferential treatment during rescue efforts, and following disasters, both women and girls suffered more from shortages of food and economic resources. Apart from the higher death toll and more injuries - both physical and psychological - it has also been noted that women suffer from more socio-

economic losses from disasters as well. In particular, women's role as mothers and primary care givers of for the elderly, disabled and children performs a uniquely significant role in deciding their disaster vulnerabilities.

In this context, gender mainstreaming in DRM has become an essential element of a DRM policy formulation as 'fostering awareness about gender equity and equality etc., to help reduce the impact of disasters, and to incorporate gender analysis in disaster management, risk reduction and sustainable development, to decrease vulnerability'. Ideally, gender

When talking about disaster risk management (DRM) in Sri Lanka, it is important to note that climate change and related disasters have a gender dimension, in which women are often affected adversely. And, just as natural disasters affect women disproportionately, response and recovery efforts which are the key elements of disaster management can also increase or reinforce existing inequalities.

When the devastating tsunami hit Sri Lanka in 2004, the majority of the dead and missing was females. The main reason behind this was that it was easier for men to survive during the tsunami because it is generally assumed that they had better knowledge of how to swim and climb trees - skills taught mainly to boys. This social prejudice means that girls and women in Sri Lanka have lower possibilities of surviving future disasters.



**Boys and girls are 14 times more likely than men to die during a disaster.**

mainstreaming covers the following aspects; policy design, decision-making, access to resources, procedures and practices, methodology, implementation and monitoring and evaluation.

## Policies in Practice - Gender Issues in DRM in Sri Lanka

The National Policy on Disaster Management of 2010 stresses on equality, diversity and inclusion of disaster management, and states that disaster management should ensure gender equality, and in particular the empowerment of girls and women. As such, in recent years most of the important policy documents related to DRM in Sri Lanka have paid special attention to gender and related issues. However, still there are gaps in addressing gender and related issues in the context of disaster management in Sri Lanka. Low participation by women in pre and post disaster decision making process is another critical issue as it creates lack of gender sensitivity in disaster management projects. Moreover, even though the importance of including women's perspective to disaster management has been recognised at the research and policy level, it is not a process that has been implemented in practice.

## Way Forward

Given the unfavourable circumstances faced by women at the time of pre and post disaster situations, it is of great importance to ensure that policies include all the key aspects of DRM (mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery) and that such policies are gender sensitive and pay special attention to women.

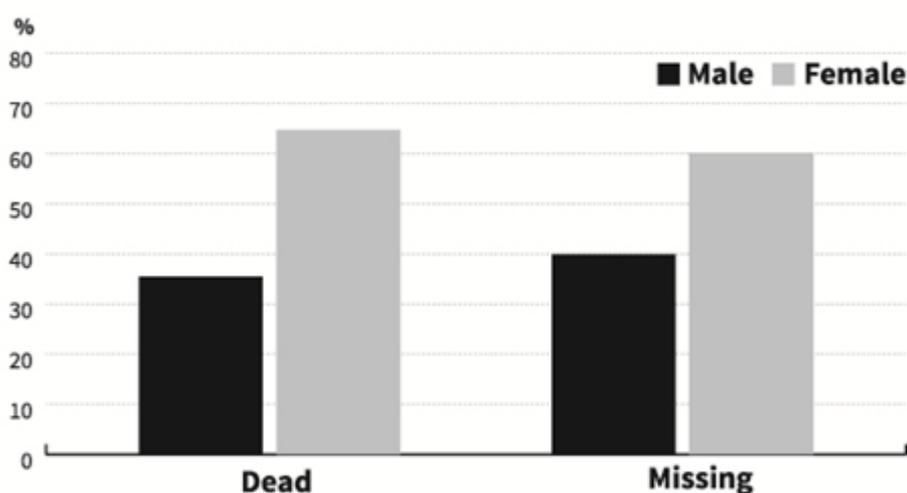
In recent years, especially after the tsunami of 2004 in Sri Lanka, policymakers have begun to pay special and progressive attention to DRM policies. Sri Lanka has taken some crucial steps (e.g. legislative acts, policy formulation and setting up institutional mechanisms) to address DRM and related issues. It could be also noticed

that attention has been paid on gender mainstreaming efforts in forming these initiatives. However, it is also observed that there are gaps and issues in implementing these policies.

The absence of DRM related gender disaggregated data, low participation of women in decision making process, both in pre and post disaster contexts, and inadequacy of integrating gender aspect at the implementation level are some of the main gender related issues in DRM which are frequently mentioned.

A participatory approach is required in order to ensure equal and gender-sensitive participation of women and men leading to better DRM policy-making and programme design. Further, monitoring mechanisms can be established to make sure that gender aspects are adequately addressed at the implementation stage of DRM programmes.

**Figure 12.2: Distribution of Dead and Missing Persons due to Tsunami who lived in Damaged Housing Units by Sex**



Source: Based on data on Tsunami 2004 by Department of Census and Statistics, Colombo Sri Lanka.

Establishing a strong and reliable national level mechanism to generate gender disaggregated data should be considered as a top priority, as data would facilitate more effective and sustainable humanitarian responses. At the same time, it is also important that policy makers, implementers, researchers and other stakeholders use gender disaggregated data as much as possible. Enhancing women's participation in decision making process should be done at all levels. It can be noticed that women's representation at the national level as well as at the community level, is weak and there is a limited space for their voices to be heard. A compulsory number or a quota for female representation can be introduced as an initial step in addressing this issue.

*This Policy Insight is based on the comprehensive chapter on "Gender Dimension of Disaster Risk Management" in the 'Sri Lanka: State of the Economy 2018 Report' - the flagship publication of the Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka (IPS). The complete report can be purchased from the publications section of the IPS, located at 100/20, Independence Avenue, Colombo 7. For more information, contact the Publications Unit on 0112143107/0112143100.*



IPS  
100/20, Independence Avenue,  
Colombo 7,  
Sri Lanka  
T: +94 11 2143100 / 2665068,  
F: +94 11 2665065