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Women's Solidarity for Resilience

A study of women's solidarity and its impact on resilience and recovery after the
6 February earthquakes in Türkiye

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Abstract

Disasters exacerbate pre-existing gender inequalities, rendering women vulnerable to various forms of harm. Nevertheless, women are not victims to be protected by men; rather, they play a significant role in post-disaster recovery. Previous studies in Türkiye's context revealed a lack of gender lens in disaster response and management. This thesis investigates the gendered experiences of women in the aftermath of the 6 February earthquakes in Türkiye, using social vulnerability concepts with an intersectional lens and feminist political ecology. It specifically looks at how women expressed solidarity, the factors impacting their solidarity, and how women's solidarity impacted local community resilience and recovery. Based on the collected data, it also provides development aid strategies to support earthquake survivor women in Türkiye and beyond. Adopting a feminist methodology, the data is collected with 9 semi-structured interviews in Türkiye and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings shed light on the challenges women face in Türkiye's post-disaster setting and show that women's solidarity initiatives are a driving force for positive change in post-disaster recovery efforts, prioritizing local knowledge, expertise, and resources. Women's solidarity and collective action positively impact their local communities and contribute to community resilience.

Keywords: women solidarity, women empowerment, disaster, disaster and gender, social vulnerability

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1. Introduction

Natural disasters are environmental events that often, but not inevitably, cause extensive loss and disruptions to people living and working in hazardous environments (Enarson, 2000). However, the risk of harm from disasters varies between and within societies due to historical and political factors. The vulnerability approach to disasters suggests that inequalities in exposure and sensitivity to risk, as well as inequalities in access to resources, capabilities, and opportunities, systematically disadvantage certain groups of people, rendering them more vulnerable to the impact of natural disasters (Neumayer and Plümper, 2007). Women and girls are more vulnerable in terms of mortality and exposure to harm in the post-disaster context, with Bradshaw and Fordham (2013) noting that due to social and cultural reasons and existing gender norms, women are more likely to die than men after a large-scale disaster. However, while women suffer disproportionately in the aftermath of disasters, resilience, and vulnerability are the opposite sides of the same coin (Twigg, 2007), and women are not only ‘victims’ who need to be saved; in fact, women are active agents of aid (Moreno and Shaw, 2018).

On February 6, 2023, two earthquakes, with magnitudes of 7.7 and 7.6, hit Türkiye. These earthquakes were the second-strongest earthquakes to occur in Türkiye in the past century, and they affected 11 big cities where more than 14 million people lived. While the earthquakes occurring on February 6, 2023, have garnered scholarly attention both domestically and internationally, a noticeable gap exists in the literature concerning the specific contributions of women within the contexts of post-disaster recovery and reconstruction efforts. The inclination of individuals to unite and demonstrate solidarity during the aftermath of disasters enhances social connections and facilitates the reorganization of societal structures (Erdoğan, 2023; Selçuk, 2024). Considering these aspects, this thesis focuses on understanding women’s experiences after the 6 February 2024 earthquakes in Türkiye. It looks at the role that women play in the post-earthquake context through their solidarity and how this impacts local community resilience. It pays special attention to women’s solidarity and discovers the factors that impact their solidarity negatively or positively. Finally, as a future development practitioner, it discusses policy implications for supporting earthquake survivor women in Türkiye and beyond. The research questions that the thesis aims to answer are as follows:

- How does ‘gender’ shape women’s experiences in the aftermath of 6 February earthquakes?
- How is women’s solidarity expressed in post-disaster towns in Türkiye and how does it impact local community resilience and recovery?
- What are the factors that impacted Turkish women’s solidarity during the recovery process?
- What kind of development aid strategies can be designed to support earthquake survivor women in Türkiye and beyond?

1.1 Thesis Structure

In Chapter 2, the thesis contextualizes the study topic and provides a literature review of the existing studies of natural disasters and gender, women’s resilience, women’s solidarity, and the roles women collectively have played in recovery and reconstruction with examples from around the world. In 2.4 and 2.5 the thesis specifies the chosen context, 6 February 2023 earthquakes in Türkiye. Chapter 3 introduces theoretical concepts of Social Vulnerability, Intersectionality and Feminist Political Ecology. Chapter 4 discusses the study context and explains the methodology in depth. Chapter 5 provides the analysis and links the findings with the theoretical framework. The research ends with a discussion, conclusion, and suggestions for further research in Chapter 6.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Natural Disasters and Gender

Natural disasters create serious consequences for the environment and/or local communities at socio-cultural, economic, psychological, and/or political/institutional/governance levels (Imperiale and Vanclay, 2021). After disasters, the disruption of daily routines, resource shortages, heightened insecurity, and increased anxiety impose significant challenges on society as a whole. However, specific groups with limited access to information and resources, as well as inadequate preparedness, often experience disproportionately greater difficulties during and after disasters.

Vulnerability to natural disasters is a multi-dimensional concept. The vulnerability of certain individuals or groups is a consequence of a social condition, which is, in part, the result of social inequalities. Indeed, research over multiple years has shown that the main driver of vulnerability is poverty (PreventionWeb, 2017). Poverty is both a driver and consequence of disaster risk, as economic pressures force people to live in unsafe locations and conditions. UNDP (2015) notes that developing nations have the financial means to construct houses that are more resistant to earthquakes as their economies advance, meanwhile, poor developing nations are less able to finance disaster mitigation. Concurrently, rapid urban growth can cause unplanned development, increasing risks during disasters (ibid.). Disaster losses in developing countries are more substantial, resulting in the country diverting its resources from human and social development to urgently needed recovery efforts and reconstruction of infrastructure (Enarson et al., 2007).

While countries face similar patterns of natural hazards, such as floods, droughts, and earthquakes, the impact of disasters varies considerably. Although natural disasters are, in fact, “natural”, their social, political, and economic repercussions are not (Puttick et al., 2018). Some demographic groups, such as women, children, the elderly, the disabled, migrants, and displaced populations, are frequently, but not always, linked to vulnerability (Lupieri, 2022).

Globally, women are more likely to die than men after a large-scale disaster, and this is due to social and cultural reasons and existing gender norms, rather than biological ones (Bradshaw and Fordham, 2013). While the term "gender" is used often in this context, its meaning is sometimes oversimplified, referring just to women rather than the intricate power dynamics that exist in cultures (UN Women, 2016). The existing gender norms result in a lack of access to resources to cope in the aftermath of a disaster. Due to women's restricted access to assets (physical, financial, human, social, and natural) and unequal power relations, women's capacity to respond is undermined (Bradshaw and Fordham, 2014). Unequal power relations are rooted in the societal roles assigned to men and women. These power relations can create social conditions that leave millions of women around the globe in substandard housing, socially marginalized, impoverished or economically insecure, overburdened with caregiving responsibilities, and lacking social power and political voice (Enarson et al., 2007). For instance, four times as many women as men died in the tsunami-affected areas of Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and India¹. Some of the reasons for this were similar across these countries: women died because they stayed behind to look for their children and other relatives, or they were at their home near the sea while their male counterparts were outside working, away from the sea, lowering their chances of being caught in the tsunami.

After natural disasters, catastrophic circumstances cause the existing family, community, and institutional security and protection to fail. In such contexts, disasters can worsen existing gender discrimination by causing a scarcity of resources and a temporary disruption of social order, leading to the exacerbation of social norms and role behaviors associated with gender inequality (Neumayer and Plümper, 2007). The consequences created after a disaster could be the "secondary disaster" that women face due to exacerbated vulnerabilities. For instance, research shows that in post-disaster contexts, the prevalence of women engaging in transactional sex to gain access to food and other basic goods during emergencies (Daniel and Logie, 2017). Meanwhile, violence against women and girls may increase post-disaster, including violence by a non-partner or intimate partner, rape/sexual assault, as well as female genital mutilation, honor killings, and the trafficking of women (Thurston et al., 2021). There were reports of widespread rape after the 2010 Haiti earthquake, while intimate partner

¹ Oxfam (2005) How Women Were Affected by the Tsunami: A Perspective from Oxfam. Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1160583/pdf/pmed.0020178.pdf>

violence was estimated to have increased by 40% in rural areas after the 2011 Christchurch earthquake in New Zealand (Thurston et al., 2021; True, 2013).

Studies also show that the coping strategies employed by survivors in the aftermath of disasters also impact female members of the families more than male members. Kabeer (2015) notes that efforts to cut back on consumption often impact female members more than males. The gender of children taken out of school appeared to vary according to whether girls' education was seen as less essential or whether boys' earning capacity was considered more necessary. For example, a drought in Zimbabwe led to a decline in women's nutritional status, but not men's, with the negative impact stronger among women from poorer households (ibid.).

Studies show that generally, women experience additional burdens as caregiving roles and responsibilities at home may increase post-disaster (Enarson et al., 2007). In Pakistan, the 2010 floods put a strain on women's gender roles in families and communities post-disaster, with research suggesting women's workload had effectively doubled as a result of the 2010 and particularly the 2011 floods that affected the Bodin district, in contrast, men's workload remained largely unchanged (Drolet et al., 2015).

The studies discussed above reveal gender-based disparities in the experiences of women and men across distinct stages of disasters, encompassing aspects such as survival rates, injuries, trauma, and recovery processes. These disparities are rooted in diverse biological, familial, social, and cultural factors, depicting unique needs and priorities for each gender throughout various phases of disaster response and recovery. Moreover, it has been shown that women exhibit more severe post-disaster vulnerabilities, which are exacerbated by gender disparities in access to limited resources. That being said, while women are typically typecast as "hapless victims protected and rescued by vigilant men", women are actively present to some degree in every aspect of disaster (Enarson and Morrow, 1998). It is crucial to examine the skills and contributions of women at various stages of the disaster management process.

2.2 Women's Resilience in Natural Disasters

Local communities impacted by disasters are confronted with circumstances that demand them to redesign and reimagine their structures and processes to survive. Resilience is described as

the ability of a social system to respond and recover from disasters and includes inherent conditions enabling the system to absorb impacts and cope with an event, as well as post-event, adaptive processes that enable the social system to re-organize, change, and learn (Cutter et al., 2008). Similarly, community resilience refers to the ability of a community to respond and recover from disasters (ibid.). Resilience and vulnerability are two sides of the same coin (Twigg, 2007).

While research recognizes that women are more vulnerable to disasters than men and experience secondary or indirect impacts that result from the disaster, it should not be presumed that women are passive recipients of aid and protection due to their inherent vulnerability, as emphasized by Enarson and Morrow (1998). Women are proactive participants in resilience-building and humanitarian action, and their time, skills, and energy are key resources in every phase of disasters, from household preparedness to community reintegration (Enarson et al., 2007). For instance, in El Morro, one of the most affected regions by the 2010 Chile earthquake and tsunami, Moreno and Shaw's (2018) study shows that the evacuation process and coping strategies were gendered as men took charge of rescue and relief operations, while women looked after their children, men taking the role of "heroes" or "rescuers", while women were the "rescued" or "victims". However, as women's resilience expanded, women's domestic and community management roles changed as they spontaneously took their skills from a domestic/household level to a community level by creating grassroots groups and showing leadership by establishing a community kitchen. Similarly, in post-earthquake Nepal, women understood reconstruction as rebuilding in a new and improved way by organizing and unifying women, addressing community issues, and getting more female leadership (Crawford and Morrison, 2021). The World Bank (2020) notes that after the 2015 earthquake in Nepal, some women were trained as masons to help repair and reconstruct houses, infrastructure, and cultural sites to be earthquake-proof. In the context of the aftermath of Hurricane Mitch, women in El Hatillo participated in multiple forms of disaster work such as clearing roads, building new houses, constructing gabions to protect the riverbanks while also growing vegetables, running a communal kitchen, and reforesting the hillsides (Cupples, 2007).

Women's resilience after disasters is an adaptive process. Taking care of the family in emergencies, taking children and animals to safety, and storage of food and other essential items are some of the functions carried out entirely by women in such situations (Ariyabandu,

2003). While these could be classified as more ‘gendered’ divisions of labor, and it could be defended that the disaster context only emphasized this gendered division, research of post-disaster literature shows that after disasters, globally, women have tended to shoulder responsibilities well outside the traditional ‘gendered’ divisions of labor. In Miami, for example, some women found employment in construction, developed new negotiating skills working with home contractors and insurance adjusters, or used disaster relief funds to escape abusive relationships (Enarson and Morrow, 1996). After Hurricane Mitch, women were found to be heavily involved in such traditional “male” work as digging wells and constructing latrines, but “*while there were some reports that men were also performing non-traditional roles like cooking, this seems to have been isolated to a few relief facilities*” (Delaney and Shrader, 2000) which shows women’s adaptability. In another location affected by Hurricane Mitch, Nicaragua, women mended roads, walked many miles in search of food and other types of help, and made makeshift shelters during the immediate crisis (Bradshaw, 2001).

2.3 Women’s Solidarity in Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development

The disaster cycle could be seen as follows: disaster mitigation and prevention phase, disaster preparedness phase, disaster phase, emergency phase, rehabilitation, and reconstruction phase (Delaney and Shrader, 2000). The emergency phase involves immediate assistance to save lives, and depending on the magnitude of the disaster, it could take days, weeks, or months. At this stage, rescuing people and meeting the survivors’ most basic needs is the priority. The rehabilitation & reconstruction phase is also called the ‘recovery’ phase, and it signifies the return of the community to normal or near normal, and it is a phase that may last for many years (Temin et al., 2015). During the recovery phase, funds and technical assistance often flow to affected areas, allowing previously excluded groups, such as ethnic minorities and poor women, to informally participate and take on new roles.

Natural disasters provide an opportunity to transform society and to use the devastation to ‘build back better’; in fact, disasters have been conceptualized as catalysts for change and as windows of opportunity (Paton, 2006; Bradshaw, 2013) in the rehabilitation and reconstruction phase. Large-scale disasters that have destroyed or damaged the region's infrastructure, as well as cultural norms regarding roles and responsibilities, present a chance for the government, civil society, and the international community to reshape the region's development. Delaney

and Shrader (2000) note that during the recovery phase after a disaster, women typically cope by utilizing formal and informal social networks to address the needs of their family, children, and the greater society. In order to do this, they establish temporary shelters, coordinate community relief efforts, use networks to accommodate displaced family members, and mobilize women's groups to meet immediate needs. In fact, according to Ariyabandu's research (2009), in many communities, women outnumber men when it comes to taking an active part in community disaster initiatives, both in leadership roles and at the grassroots. Meanwhile, men often rely on strategies that distance them from their families and communities, mostly to earn an income. In such cases where men are absent, women are the sole responsible for rebuilding lives.

Through the post-disaster rebuilding phase, women have been observed to have increased participation in the community, playing a more public role at times in leadership positions. They have shown cooperation and 'solidarity'. Women's solidarity in post-disaster contexts has made itself visible through grassroots groups, with women taking their domestic/household skills and applying them to the community level. Women have been active in rebuilding their communities in post-disaster recovery, and they outnumber men in leadership and membership of emergent grassroots groups (Enarson, 2000). In 2004 and 2005, a series of four hurricanes landed in Volusia County, Florida, USA. As a result of the lack of help more than 48 hours after the hurricane, a small group of women spontaneously organized and provided outreach and assistance to the community overlooked by the government: Outreach teams of women delivered care packages into the impacted areas of the community and, while handing out supplies, also searched for those in need who had been passed over by the traditional disaster-serving organizations (Drolet et al, 2015). Later, they contributed to the formation of a Community Disaster Response Group (ibid.). A similar impact of women's solidarity beyond the immediate survival was seen in Nepal: after the 2015 Nepal earthquake, women's groups advocated for the integration of gender equality and women's empowerment in disaster recovery and reconstruction efforts in the country which resulted in the 15-point Kathmandu Declaration on disaster risk management, endorsed by government authorities and development partners, that set out key demands for gender-responsive recovery and reconstruction (GFDRR, 2018). These studies illustrate the important role women's solidarity plays in disaster recovery and reconstruction phases.

Women's solidarity and resilience also helped in rebuilding after the 6.3 magnitude earthquake that happened in the Latur and Osmanabad districts in India on 30 September 1993. Yonder et al. (2012) describe how the non-profit organization SSP engaged women's groups in the Repair and Strengthening (R&S) program, empowering them to take on leadership roles despite facing challenges and social resistance from men. The non-profit organization used women's solidarity as a means to empower women, and women used village assemblies to address household issues, demand procedural changes, and hold local leaders accountable, eventually involving government officials in decision-making processes. As women gained a reputation as resource providers and problem solvers, social relations changed. Officials became more responsive and trusted women's information, and community support strengthened women's political identity (Yonder et al., 2012).

Another example of Women's Solidarity appeared after the Indian Ocean Tsunami hit the coasts of Sri Lanka on 26 December 2004. A women's organization known as Women's Savings Effort (WSE) played a significant role in post-disaster community rebuilding; they organized independent community-based Women's Organizations, which initiated their own collective savings fund in the hope of providing credit facilities to their members to restart their lost livelihoods. As Renuka and Srimulyani (2015) describe, the destruction caused by the tsunami was a catalyst for the WSE to organize and mobilize the affected women to use their collective strength to overcome the challenges. Prior to the tsunami, most women lived and worked as housewives and were not involved in social or development activities. After the tsunami, they formed women's organizations, held meetings, developed financial rules, and met with government officials to negotiate rights and services. Forming women's groups helped them gain respect and influence, advocating for needed facilities from local authorities. After the project, around 80% of women gained significant decision-making power, becoming more engaged in their communities and more mobile. Renuka and Srimulyani (2015) also found that women's collective efforts helped women's groups address issues such as sexual abuse, violence, and land ownership. They acted as a pressure group on policymakers and bureaucrats through advocacy programs. Here, the study revealed the success of the concept of Linking Relief, Rehabilitation, and Development (LRRD). LRRD approaches in natural disasters suggest that emergency relief operations, while addressing immediate needs, should also incorporate measures to enhance resilience for future crises by offering long-term development benefits and reinforcing risk management (EUR-Lex, 2015). WSE, using this approach,

provided short-term interventions for survival while also providing long-term effects as the women's organizations' confidence grew collectively and enabled them to exercise their rights.

Women assuming non-stereotypical gender roles, such as rescue, repair, and construction; and women taking on leadership roles could trigger societal changes in the community in the post-disaster phase. In the 1999 Düzce earthquake in Türkiye, men lost their breadwinner role due to job and business losses. Women and girls took jobs outside the home, prompting some men to reassess their contributions to household chores as they saw their wives and daughters' increased workload (Kümbetoğlu et al., 2007). After Hurricane Mitch, studies revealed that some men started to fulfill social roles previously performed by women, including gardening, food preparation, and water provision. Similarly, women's active participation in the disaster response, both as individuals and as members of women's committees, enhanced their sense of self-worth, resulting in a sense of personal social empowerment as a direct result of the disaster (Delaney and Shrader, 2000). Expanding this level of empowerment would bring about an immense paradigm shift in the region (ibid.).

2.4 Contextual Framework: Türkiye Earthquakes and Women Solidarity

Due to its geographical location, the natural disasters that affect Türkiye are mainly geophysical and meteorological disasters such as earthquakes, floods, frost, avalanches, snow, storms, landslides, rockfall, lightning, heavy rain, drought, and fog (Ergünay, 2007). However, in Türkiye the natural hazard that is experienced the most frequently while also having the largest destructive impacts are earthquakes. The country is located between two continents and three major plates, resulting in it experiencing major seismic events. The North Anatolian Fault passes through the Sea of Marmara, making Istanbul very susceptible to earthquakes. The 17 August 1999 earthquake in Izmit/Golcuk, also called the Marmara earthquake, was a turning point in Türkiye's history. The initial shock, lasting less than a minute and measuring 7.4 in magnitude, was succeeded by two moderate aftershocks. More than 17,000 people died, and an estimated 500,000 were left homeless as thousands of buildings collapsed or were heavily damaged. The affected region in these earthquakes had a share of 35% of Türkiye's GDP, indicating the significance of earthquake risk to the country's development (Gencer, 2013).

During the recovery phase of the 1999 earthquake, the participation and role of women in community-based projects and activities was particularly noteworthy. The effectiveness of civil society organizations was emphasized, with Jalali (2002) describing disasters as a political event that challenged the sovereignty of institutional powers (Jalali, 2002, p. 136). KEDV, a grassroots NGO founded by women, emerged after the 1999 earthquake in Türkiye. Recognizing the pivotal role of women in disaster relief, KEDV collaborated with local stakeholders to establish centers in tent cities where women could gather, share resources, and support each other. These centers evolved into hubs for income-generating activities, fostering women's empowerment (KEDV, 2019). KEDV's Resilient Neighborhood Program, initiated after the earthquake, aims to empower women and their communities in disaster preparedness and local development, fostering women's participation in these processes (KEDV website).

Studies conducted after this earthquake noted that solidarity networks in Golcuk had significant benefits for women during the disaster recovery. Ganapati and Uichi (2012) use Golcuk as a case study to show how solidarity mattered for women after the earthquake. Women's cooperatives organized, producing candles and tailored goods, which helped women to overcome their psychological trauma as it kept them busy while being productive and contributing economically to their families. In fact, Ganapati and Uichi (2012) reveal that this helped women better express themselves in their households and in their larger social contexts, it helped women gain "civic consciousness", thereby allowing them to fight for their rights in Türkiye's patriarchal society. Patriarchy refers to: *'A particular complex web of both attitudes and relationships that position women and men, girls and boys in distinct and unequal categories, that value particular forms of masculinity over virtually all forms of femininity, and that ensure that men who fulfill these favored forms of manliness will be able to assert control over most women'* (Enloe, 2017, p. 49). This study is important as it shows the impact of women's solidarity networks beyond the immediate disaster recovery phase.

Despite the significant impact of the Marmara earthquakes, in Türkiye, there remains a lack of studies and policies examining these events through a gender lens. Particularly noteworthy is the absence of any reference to "woman," "women," or "girls" within the Turkish Disaster Response Plan², first released in 2014 and revised in 2022. This highlights the gender-blind

² AFAD (2022) Türkiye Afet Müdahale Planı (Turkish Disaster Response Plan). Available at: <https://www.afad.gov.tr/Türkiye-afet-mudahale-planı>

nature of Türkiye's disaster response strategy, which was reflected in the response to the 6 February 2023 earthquakes.

2.5 Case Study: 6 February 2023 Earthquakes

On February 6, 2023, two earthquakes with their epicenter in Kahramanmaraş, with magnitudes of 7.7 and 7.6, hit both Türkiye and Syria. It was the second-strongest earthquake to occur in Türkiye in the past century, and it affected 11 big cities where more than 14 million people lived. Türkiye's official numbers indicated that 58,000 people died in the earthquake. In the aftermath, the government pledged to rebuild 650,000 homes within a year; however, only 15% of the homes were rebuilt, and in June of 2023, more than 670,000 people were still living in small, temporary, metal container homes (Bebek, 2024).

The gendered nature of natural disasters was observed in the disaster-stricken towns, with women being disproportionately affected during the rehabilitation and recovery phase. Even though studies show women's susceptibility to harm during and in the aftermath of natural disasters due to socially constructed gender-specific disadvantages, relief efforts were gender-blind. Due to Türkiye being a patriarchal society, the gender roles naturally led women to care for family members, cooking, cleaning, and being trapped in care work, which led to women struggling to find time for anything else. The unpaid domestic labor became an even heavier burden during times of crisis, with NGOs active in the regions reporting that women and girls still face a huge burden of care work, emotional stress, poverty, health problems, and most importantly, violence (Karademir, 2023). The Turkish NGO Equality for Women (EŞİK) Platform noted in their report that single women, divorced women, and women who experienced violence and wished to live separately from their husbands did not receive their own tents after the earthquake (EŞİK, 2023). This caused increased violence, one example being that a divorced woman had to share her tent with her ex-husband, who assaulted her with boiling water while she slept (ibid.).

Six months after the earthquake, research in the earthquake-stricken locations showed alarming struggles for women and girls. Due to the lack of hospitals, disruptions in health services, water shortages, and hygiene issues in the earthquake zone, there were serious problems concerning

women's health. Women's organizations had to organize campaigns to voice the need for sanitary pads. In this context, the needs arising from being a woman were forgotten or overlooked by the government (Ayata et al., 2023). Sexual violence, especially by husbands, was common, as women were forced into sexual intercourse and had difficulty accessing contraceptives (EMEK, 2023). The increased care work and responsibilities that women have caused them to develop physical and psychological health problems. During all these difficult conditions, earthquake survivor women were also left with the "task" of recovering the deteriorating mental health of their family members who suffer from psychological problems (ibid.).

Soon after the 6 February earthquakes, Turkish women from other parts of the country came together to offer support. Grassroots feminist organizations and feminist solidarity groups were fast to act, providing crucial aid and relief to those impacted by the disaster. Apart from providing hygiene items to women, they also worked in creating women-exclusive tents, a secure environment exclusively for women survivors to gather, enjoy tea, have discussions about various topics, and exchange earthquake experiences (Bajec, 2023). Research shows that women's solidarity groups are beneficial for women's mental health. Women experience physiological, psychological, economic, or social improvement after joining such groups (Koegler et al., 2019). Women have higher social solidarity among themselves compared to men as they interact with other members more, share more, and the solidarity and unity among women members give them a platform to share problems and seek help (Galab and Rao, 2003). Collectively resisting social injustice and caring for each other cultivates solidarity in communities and generates emotional support for members (Knearem et al., 2024). This further highlights the critical nature of feminist solidarity initiatives, particularly in the disaster-stricken town with women having lower socioeconomic status and high rates of gender-based violence. Feminist Solidarity for Disaster Relief, formed on the night of February 6th by women, highlighted in their studies that disasters were moments where women's solidarity and access to learning from each other's experiences helped to turn experience into knowledge, which was necessary to render women's rights, demands and struggles visible, to avoid exacerbating the disaster's harmful effects on women (Baytok, 2023). Women's empowerment in the post-disaster reconstruction phase could only be possible if women were empowered to talk about rights, properties, livelihood, and access to resources, and if they do not express their needs and views, then NGOs and government organizations will not succeed in developing

them (Thurairajah and Baldry, 2010). Therefore, women's solidarity groups are vital in making women's voices heard.

3. Theoretical Framework

This thesis aims to apply social vulnerability concepts through an intersectional lens and feminist political ecology (FPE) to share women's gendered struggles after the earthquake and account for women's empowerment through solidarity.

3.1 Social Vulnerability with an Intersectional Lens

Vulnerability is the 'human dimension' of disasters, and it refers to the attributes of an individual or a collective and their circumstances that determine their ability to predict, manage, withstand, and recover from the consequences of a natural disaster (Wisner et al., 2004). The concept encompasses various elements that define the extent to which an individual's life, livelihood, property, and other possessions are exposed to the potential harm caused by a specific and identifiable occurrence or a sequence of such occurrences in both the natural and social realms (ibid.). Vulnerability has three key dimensions: (1) susceptibility, (2) (lack of) coping capacity, and (3) exposure. UNDRR's platform PreventionWeb (2017) explains these three dimensions as follows:

- *Exposure refers to the possibility that a hazardous event would damage human settlements and the surrounding environment because of their proximity to the phenomenon's sphere of effect and the absence of physical resistance.*
- *Susceptibility refers to the inherent tendency of ecosystems and societies to suffer damage due to the relative weaknesses and vulnerabilities of human settlements, as well as unfavorable conditions and conditions encompassing physical, ecological, social, economic, cultural, and institutional aspects.*
- *Lack of coping capacity is the limitations in access to and mobilization of the resources of the social-ecological system and the incapacity to respond in absorbing the impact.*

It is not possible to analyze the vulnerability and capacity of society in the face of a disaster in an accurate manner without taking gender into account. The concept of gender draws attention

to socially constructed characteristics of men and women. This refers to the norms, roles and behaviors assigned to the sexes in the society in which they live. Gender identity impacts our lives, and it shapes people's behaviors in disasters. Drawing from Enarson's (2000) examples, the first dimension of vulnerability, exposure, here refers to the risk that exposes them to hazards, such as living in a seismic zone or in a building at risk of collapsing. This is related to poverty, but in the context of the 6th February earthquakes in Türkiye, even newly built expensive buildings were destroyed³. This also ties in with the second vulnerability, showing that the cities did not have the capacity to mitigate the effects of the earthquake (for example, seismic-zone construction standards, earthquake preparedness programs). Finally, the last dimension of vulnerability, "lack of coping capacities," refers to social vulnerability. It indicates that certain groups have less access to essential resources that would help them respond to natural disasters, including but not limited to income, education, health, and social networks. The access to resources and control over assets may exhibit gender disparities since women and girls typically have lower levels of access and control compared to males and boys (Bradshaw and Fordham, 2014).

Studies have indicated the importance of gender in disaster research (Enarson, 2000; Forthergill, 1996; Neumayer and Plümper, 2007) As emphasized in the literature review section, women are more 'vulnerable' in the face of disaster. Women are disproportionately more affected by disasters than men; in the aftermath of disasters, women are more vulnerable than men, and they are more susceptible to mental and physical exhaustion due to increased responsibilities. Natural disasters, including earthquakes, reinforce vulnerability and "exacerbate existing patterns of gender discrimination that render females more vulnerable to the fatal impact of disasters" (Neumayer and Plümper, 2007).

This thesis uses social vulnerability through an intersectionality lens to understand women's experiences, as the concept of vulnerability lacks stability and consensus in terms of the indicators that contribute to its classification (Gomes and Martinho, 2021). Women who are at the intersection of multiple vulnerabilities are disproportionately affected by earthquakes. Intersectionality is a framework that was created through Crenshaw's (1989) work that stresses the importance of attending to multiple, intersecting identities (e.g., race, gender, class, sexual

³ BBC (2023) Turkey earthquake: Why did so many buildings collapse? Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/64568826>

identity) and the associated systems of power and oppression. Crenshaw (1989) argues that intersecting systems of oppression create unique experiences of marginalization and privilege. Human experience is jointly shaped by multiple social positions and cannot be adequately understood by considering social positions independently (Bauer et al., 2021). This underscores the importance of considering multiple axes of identity in disaster research and response efforts. In the context of disasters, social characteristics such as gender, age, physical and mental health status, occupation, marital status, sexuality, race, ethnicity, religion, and immigration status may have a bearing on potential loss, injury, or death; it could also impact the prospects and processes for changing that situation (Wisner et al., 2012).

Intersectional approaches help analyze and critique discriminatory practices that disproportionately impact historically marginalized people, particularly in disasters. They emphasize the interplay of privilege, power, and oppression, creating unequal socioeconomic outcomes based on identities and conditions. This approach is beneficial in disaster studies as it highlights systemic patterns that create precarious situations for some while protecting others; it also helps understand individuals' capacities to prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters, as well as their ability to avoid or reduce risks that make them susceptible to disaster (Jean et al., 2023). By considering intersecting factors such as class, ethnicity, marital status, disability status, and socio-economic status alongside gender, I aim to provide an understanding of how various social identities intersect to shape women's experiences in post-earthquake contexts.

3.2 Feminist Political Ecology

As gender plays an important role in how disaster and post-disaster are experienced, feminist theorists have also become involved in disaster studies. Enarson (2012, p. 26) describes that a “grand theory” of gender and disaster is not possible, which could be interpreted as there being no theory that encompasses all aspects of gender and disaster. However, Enarson and Phillips (2000) note that feminist political ecology (hereafter, FPE) “most clearly joins gender inequalities, environmental degradation, and disaster vulnerability”.

FPE began with the critique of mainstream political ecology's neglect of gender differences in human-environment relations. Rocheleau et al. (1996) established the FPE as a feminist approach to political ecology, where gender becomes a main category analysis in relation to

understanding how decision-making practices and socio-political forces influence environmental laws and issues, alongside access to and control over resources. FPE treats gender as an important variable that interacts with class, race, and other factors to shape processes of ecological change (Rocheleau et al., 1996, p. 4). It pays attention to gender roles, gender inequalities and patriarchy as they intersect with class dynamics in determining access to resources (Paulson and Gezon, 2015). It also points to gender inequalities leading to reduced rights for women to own land and gain access to energy, water, and sanitation facilities, all of which have a negative impact on human health, the environment, and sustainable development (Harcourt, 2023). Key research themes are (1) "gendered knowledge," (2) "gendered environmental rights and responsibilities," and (3) "gendered environmental politics and grassroots activism (Rocheleau et al., 1996, p. 6).

I believe using an FPE lens will be useful in analyzing women's solidarity. Women's empowerment and acknowledgment of women's agency remain a key focus of the FPE scholarship. 'Agency' is a key concept in feminist theory. However, it has different meanings according to the context, and it is noted that agency is inseparable from the analysis of power (McNay, 2016). Agency is defined as what a person is free to do and achieve in pursuit of whatever goals or values he or she regards as important (Sen, 1985, p. 203), and it involves the meaning, motivation, and purpose that individuals bring to their activity, their sense of agency, or 'the power within' (Kabeer, 1999, p. 3). Agency invokes an ability to overcome barriers, to question or confront situations of oppression and deprivation, and, as individuals or together with others, to have influence and be heard in society (Hanmer and Klugman, 2016).

Disaster studies demonstrate that women possess a diverse array of characteristics that make women valuable contributors across all stages of disaster management. Their unique knowledge, skills, expertise, and experiences play a crucial role in effectively dealing with the aftermath of disasters. In my thesis, FPE will help me analyze women's position in gendered power relationships within their community in a post-disaster context, particularly those related to (1) women's access and rights to resources, including natural resources and (2) women's solidarity and empowerment within their households and communities.

4. Methodology

To respond to the research questions, this study draws mainly on FPE and the social vulnerability concept with an intersectionality lens and uses a feminist methodology. It aims to describe the Turkish women's experiences after the earthquake, the gendered impact of the natural disaster that they experienced, women's solidarity, and how it impacted local community resilience and recovery. Considering the topic is heavily focused on experiences, I chose qualitative methods and conducted fieldwork in Istanbul, Türkiye, with the interviews taking place through online video calls. The data was collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews and analyzed by thematic analysis.

4.1 Feminist Research

Feminist methodology promotes integrating a perspective focused on women and gender into the research process, aiming to address issues through the lens of women's experiences. In the process of knowledge production, feminist researchers have attempted to make connections between the idea of gender, gender equality, experience, and the reality of intersectional gender discrimination (Saeidzadeh, 2023). This thesis is feminist research in the way that it aims to give voice to Turkish women's experiences. In this regard, McHugh (2014) states that one goal of feminist research is to attend to the power dynamics in the conduct of research, to expose invisible or concealed power dynamics. Feminist research is a commitment to equality and social justice, focusing on the gendered, historical, and political processes involved in knowledge production, and it also strives to explore and illuminate the diversity of the experiences of women and other marginalized groups (Wilson, 2023). Feminist research integrates feminist principles throughout the entire process, from question development to data collection and analysis. It emphasizes collaborative, non-hierarchical, and reflexive approaches. Feminist researchers use various methods, including qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. Letherby (2011) argues that the focus is not on the methods used but on the pursuit of feminist goals.

This study focuses on women's experiences after the earthquake in terms of how women gather and organize, using solidarity as a means of empowerment. Feminist solidarity is a cultural movement that resists women's socio-economic inequalities and patriarchal power; it unites

women in their refusal to accept sexism, misogyny, exploitation of women's labor, emotion, bodies, and physical and financial violence towards women (Wickström et al., 2021). It involves shared responsibility for others' lives, working with care and intimacy toward promoting social transformations through democratic engagement.

4.2 Data Collection Methods

4.2.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

For this thesis, I used qualitative data collection methods. In order to be able to dive deeply into the concepts discussed I chose the semi-structured interview methodology for its versatile and flexible nature (Magaldi and Berler, 2020). Semi-structured interviews offer insight into the individual experience, enabling the researcher to explore participants' narratives. It is sufficiently structured to address specific research topics while leaving space for participants to offer new meanings to the study focus (Galletta, 2013).

The semi-structured interviews require a certain level of previous knowledge of the research topics, which the researcher uses to prepare an interview guide. This guide provides a structure for the interview; however it is not necessary to follow it strictly. Instead, the researcher aims to learn more about the study topic by getting similar information from each participant and giving them ideas for what to talk about by using this interview guide (Gill et al., 2008).

I designed the semi-structured interview in Turkish, my native language, and translated it into English. The semi-structured interviews started with an introduction to the research. Then I asked the participant about their consent to participate in the interview. I followed this up with a question on if they consented to be recorded or me taking notes. The interview was divided into three parts in terms of themes; the first part included introductory questions, the second part included questions about the aftermath of the earthquake and what the participants had observed or experienced in terms of women survivors and women solidarity, third and final part included questions about what the participants anticipated would happen in the future. The interview guide can be found in the Appendix 1.

4.2.2 Sampling

For sampling, I used the “chain method” or “snowball sampling,” which is a non-probability method of sampling that involves samples that are available to the researcher or are selected by the researcher (Naderifar et al., 2017). This method is efficient and cost-effective to access the research participants. The snowball sampling method I used was purposive in the way that through the literature review, I came across women’s organization's research and publications, as well as women journalists who worked in the earthquake region for a certain period and published articles. I contacted them at first. The ones who replied and agreed to join the interview, provided me with the contact of their acquaintances who conducted similar work, whom I reached out to later to invite them to take part in my research. The snowball method provides the researcher with the opportunity to communicate better with the samples, as they are acquaintances of the first sample, and the first sample is linked to the researcher (Polit-O’Hara and Beck, 2006). In total, I had interviews with 9 key informants. Relevant information on interview participants can be found in Appendix 2.

4.2.3 Positionality Reflexivity and Ethical Considerations

As the researcher's positionality can impact all aspects and stages of the research (Holmes, 2020), it is important to conduct a self-assessment of my views and positions. As a Turkish feminist woman, the study context held personal significance for me. I have not experienced the 6 February 2023 earthquakes, and I have not visited the region personally post-earthquake. However, I was following the news closely at the time that it happened. This means that I already had background information and certain assumptions about the context before starting my work on this thesis. As Ritchie et al. (2013) suggest, all research will be influenced by the researcher, and there is no completely ‘neutral’ or ‘objective’ knowledge. Therefore, I aimed to achieve ‘empathetic neutrality’ (ibid.). I aimed to stay as neutral as possible and let the informants speak and lead, which was possible thanks to the semi-structured interview method employed. To prevent causing additional trauma to female earthquake survivors, I refrained from interviewing those who directly experienced the earthquake. I contacted civic organizations, non-governmental organizations, women's organizations, and journalists who agreed to participate in the interview. The interviews were conducted through online video calls. To ensure participant anonymity, the participants were numbered in the order that they were interviewed.

4.2.4 Limitations

There are some limitations to this research that should be taken into consideration. Firstly, the sample size is limited to only nine informants. Furthermore, within the interview sample, there exists a notable lack of representation of marginalized groups such as lesbian, trans, queer, and other sexually or gender diverse (LGBTQ+) women and migrant women, as none of the interview participants had worked with them directly. This reflects a shortcoming of the intersectional analysis in this thesis, which is essential for clarifying the complex interactions between different social identities and vulnerabilities.

Moreover, the snowball sampling strategy employed in the research could be subject to limitations, potentially affecting the generalizability of findings and restricting the depth of insights into the diverse experiences of marginalized communities. However, it must be noted that the intent of qualitative research is not to generalize, but to develop an in-depth and contextualized exploration of a central phenomenon (Creswell, 2005).

4.3 Thematic Analysis

For analyzing the qualitative data, I have used thematic analysis, which includes identifying patterns or themes within the dataset. I chose thematic analysis above other qualitative methods for its fit with the semi-structured interview method, which included open-ended questions, and the feminist research methodology, which aimed to give voice to women's experiences. Following the guidance of Braun and Clarke (2006), in the search for themes, I have looked for repetitions, metaphors and analogies, similarities, and differences. A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set (ibid.).

I used Bryman's (2015) and Braun and Clarke's (2006) guidance for assisting with thematic analysis. First, I transcribed the interviews, translated them into English from Turkish, and then I read through them carefully to increase familiarity. During this process I created initial codes about interesting findings, assigning relevant data to each code. Afterward, I gathered the codes and identified themes and subthemes. This process included reviewing the themes and checking

if they worked in relation to the quotes they were assigned to. The last stage involved refining the specifics for each theme and subthemes.

5. Findings and Analysis

This chapter presents the data gathered through semi-structured interviews conducted with journalists, NGO workers, and volunteers who had closely worked or were currently working with women in earthquake-stricken towns. The analysis focuses on the earthquake survivor women's experiences in container cities or tents, described by the informants as they had closely worked with them and observed them. In line with my research questions, first, I present the gendered experiences of earthquake survivor women, discussing the impact of traditional gender norms on women's experiences. Then, I look at how women's solidarity is expressed in post-earthquake contexts, the role of women's solidarity in empowering women and how that solidarity has impacted community resilience and recovery. I also identify the factors positively or negatively affecting women's solidarity. Taking an intersectionality approach, it aims to reveal women's various experiences and struggles based on their marital status⁴, disability status, ethnicity in post-disaster contexts, and how the women's solidarity impacted their empowerment. Finally, looking at it from the lens of a future development practitioner, it also aims to give insights into development aid strategies for sustainable development in earthquake-stricken areas.

5.1 Gendered Experiences of Earthquake Survivor Women

The two earthquakes, with magnitudes of 7.8 and 7.5, affected the provinces of Adıyaman, Hatay, Kahramanmaraş, Kilis, Osmaniye, Gaziantep, Malatya, Şanlıurfa, Diyarbakır, Elazığ and Adana in Southern and Southeastern Türkiye on 6 February 2023. The key informants had visited and worked specifically in Malatya (1) and Hatay (8). Disasters exacerbate pre-existing inequalities in areas such as education, income, gender, ability/disability, and social status (Dominey-Howes, 2021). Türkiye struggles with gender inequality; in fact, Türkiye ranked 129th among 146 countries in the World Economic Forum's (WEF) Global Gender Inequality

⁴ Marital status is important in Turkish societal and cultural context as widowed, divorced or separated women have the highest representation among women who are exposed to violence (Adak et al., 2021)

Index for 2023⁵. The implications of this gender inequality were reflected in the everyday life of men and women even prior to the earthquake; however, the consensus of key informants was that there was no location-specific gender inequality, meaning that women in a specific city did not experience more gender inequality than the other cities. Especially Hatay, where most of the key informants had worked, noted that it was a very diverse city with various ethnicities and religions, which resulted in multiple languages spoken, such as Turkish, Kurdish, and Arabic.

This diverse population meant that each group had its own traditions in terms of gender inequality and women's participation in the workforce; however, the consensus, as described by all key informants, was the fact that women were present in many areas of the workforce including men-dominated ones such as drivers of public transportation, and women cooperatives were very active. That being said, the women's labor force participation rate in the affected region was still lower than the rate in Türkiye as a whole⁶.

The care work duties were the most noticeable inequality between men and women. With Türkiye's gender inequality, the household duties largely fell on the women with the men being expected to provide for their families, and this was also observed in Hatay, with women being responsible for providing care work in the house. There was also the fact that Hatay did not have many business opportunities, with (P4) describing that in Hatay, many men left the city for work and left their wives with her or his mother, along with the children, which resulted in lesser women participating in the workforce and instead staying home to care for their children and parents.

Women's high vulnerability to disasters, their likelihood of suffering material damage and /or physical harm, and their capacity to recover from the disaster are influenced by gender roles and norms and unequal access to power and resources (Horton, 2012). In Türkiye, in the aftermath of the two large earthquakes, women survivors' experiences, as described by the

⁵ World Economic Forum (2023) Global Gender Gap Report 2023. Available at: <https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-gender-gap-report-2023/>

⁶ UN Women (2023) Brief on Earthquakes in Türkiye: Impacts and Priorities for Women and Girls: Available at: https://eca.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/UN%20Women%20Brief%20on%20Earthquake%20in%20Türkiye%20Gendered%20impacts%20and%20response_0.pdf

informants, were influenced by intersecting factors such as age, ethnicity, socio-economic status, marital status, and disability, with the common agreement being that women faced a disproportionate level of challenges and burdens.

In the aftermath of the earthquakes, temporary settlements in the form of container or tent cities were set up by municipalities for those whose homes were destroyed. Informants described that *“the container cities were crowded, the living quarters were in close proximity to each other, and there was no feeling of security”*. This living situation resulted in various challenges for the women earthquake survivors, leaving them vulnerable to harassment, violence, illnesses, and mental distress. Recovery and reconstruction can also leave displaced women and girls in inadequately designed camps and shelters where they are at heightened risk of experiencing violence (Thurston et al., 2021).

Interview participants (P1, P4, P6) noted how recently divorced women whose court processes were ongoing at the time of the earthquake were assigned to the same tent or container as their ex-husbands by the municipality as their surnames had not changed yet. In some cases where the ex-husband was violent, women were stuck in the small living spaces with their assailants. There were also cases of single adult women or widowed women whose husbands passed away in the earthquake, living alone in the containers, resulting in feelings of unsafety and being afraid of harassment.

Many studies have explained the physical violence committed against women by both known and unknown men during catastrophic times, such as changes in partner dynamics during extreme situations, the use of aggressive solutions during times of crisis, stress brought on by the destruction of homes and livelihoods, frustration from unemployment and low income, extended stays in shelters, inadequate or compromised support systems, and trauma (Kinnvall and Rydstrom, 2019, p. 9). Due to gender-based social conditioning, men and boys who had not developed the skills of domestic chores and caregiving could be largely isolated after disasters, which could increase violent tendencies due to the lack of coping mechanisms (Ariyabandu, 2009). This is fitting with (P6)'s description, noting that men were unemployed, stuck in the container/tent cities, and unable to cope with their grief and handle their trauma. During crises, such violence exploits existing gender inequalities and power imbalances, perpetuated by structural violence and disaster-related stressors can exacerbate this violence,

leading both first-time and habitual abusers to commit acts of violence (Nguyen and Rydstrom, 2018). Despite there being cases of women being subjected to sexual or physical violence in the container and tent cities, there were no courthouses or police stations left in Hatay, as the whole city was destroyed. Even if they were intact, there was no public transportation available for women to visit local authorities and report abuse. This shows that there was an oversight from the local authorities in terms of securing the safety of women and taking measures against gender-based violence.

Adding to the gendered vulnerability of the living quarters was the fact that the bathroom and shower facilities were in one common area in the container/tent city, causing feelings of unsafety to women, especially young women and mothers with young children feeling at risk of harassment. It has been studied that such living places can also put women at heightened risk of experiencing health risks due to poor sanitary conditions (Fulu, 2007). (P8) described that in Hatay container city, at night, women avoided going to the bathroom and did not allow their children to go alone. This coping mechanism of avoiding public bathroom facilities made women and children more vulnerable to health problems.

“The conditions of the living quarters cause women to feel uneasy. Going to the bathroom is an activity that should not make them feel uneasy, but women get nervous if they need to go at night since there is not enough lighting and security, and if the bathroom is far away from their tent, they fear the time it takes to walk there.” - (P8)

From a social vulnerability perspective, a lack of adequate consideration for women's needs (including health) increases women's vulnerability factor (Massetot, 2022). In the context of this study, it was found that women and girls also faced challenges in accessing essential resources such as menstruation products and contraceptives, as these items were not seen as 'essential'. Since menstruation is still considered taboo in some locations, women were unable to express their need for sanitary pads and clean underwear from young soldiers who were primarily responsible for distributing aid. It was noted by multiple informants that, as the public bathroom facilities lacked hygiene, and as these personal hygiene items for women were not easily available, it raised health concerns, adding to the already challenging situation. Studies note that sanitary supplies and privacy for menstruating women are rarely available in post-

disaster settings due to constraints on resources or a gender-neutral approach to disaster response (Tearne et al., 2021).

“In the field, women often requested menstrual products when we asked about their needs. Women may not be able to tell a 19-year-old male soldier that they need underwear; even if women don't ask, this should be delivered to them. We saw cases of male authorities yelling, saying, ‘You did not request menstrual pads, so we do not have pads for you!’” - (P6)

Enarson (2007) draws on feminist theories of inequality and labor to note that gender norms and structural inequalities shape the allocation of disaster-related tasks and responsibilities within households and communities. Meanwhile, looking at it from a social vulnerability lens, Masselot (2022) notes that women's vulnerability is shaped by the patriarchal structure. In a disaster context, the care work and reproductive labor, such as caring for children and the elderly, cleaning the house, and cooking, are assigned to women and place additional burdens on their shoulders. This was also the case in Türkiye.

“The unpaid care burden of women increased tremendously... Their houses may have been destroyed, but it was still up to women to cook, wash dishes, and take care of the children in the tent. Instead of experiencing their own trauma, women gave all their attention to their children. They also took on the burden of caring for the wounded, sick, bedridden, elderly people.” - (P6)

Enarson (2012) states that in post-disaster contexts, the gendered division of labor leads to women having multiple responsibilities, such as social reproductive labor referring to the unpaid work and responsibilities involved in sustaining and reproducing society, particularly through caring directly for oneself and others (childcare, elder care, healthcare), maintaining physical spaces and organizing resources as part of an indirect process of care for oneself and others (Hester and Snircek, 2017).

In Türkiye, due to the patriarchal society resulting in a gendered division of labor, women took on most domestic and caregiving duties while men are less engaged in these activities. (P8), from the organization ‘Women’s Human Rights’ providing mental health support to earthquake

survivors described that even earthquake survivors whose houses were intact had to host relatives who lost their houses, which again resulted in women's burden of care increasing as they found themselves cleaning, cooking, and caring for the elderly and disabled.

Informants described that women became the 'organizer' or 'leader' of their households, keeping the family together. This was a role that they had unconsciously taken, with some informants noting that this was due to the "*natural maternal instinct of women*" and "*women's ability to adjust and adapt*". All interviewed informants described that, as a result of the traditional caregiving roles and responsibilities, women took the responsibility of taking care of the family members and living headquarters, making extreme efforts to adjust to the new conditions of life. An evident indicator of gender inequality regarding gendered division of labor can be seen in the comment of one civil society member (P1) interviewed:

"Textbooks and storybooks have consistently shown women doing housework, cooking, and taking care of children. A lot of women accept the care work duties as the norm. At times of crisis, such as the aftermath of an earthquake when survival is crucial, both men and women embrace the mentality of "everyone should do what they do best." Traditionally, women are seen as best suited for maintaining household order and caring for family members. Female bird builds the nest, after all. Thus, women assume this responsibility unquestioningly." - (P1)

Women did not hesitate to take the role of 'provider' to be able to meet their family's needs. As one NGO informant recounted, the mothers of the families persisted in seeking essential items such as diapers for their children despite the absence of adequate provisions, while their husbands remained sidelined, unable, or unwilling to assert their needs in a landscape overshadowed by the dominance of gender norms.

"At the aid distribution points, the woman asks for diapers for her child, and her husband watches from a distance because he can no longer meet his family's needs as the father of the family. Women do everything to keep their families afloat. Women adapted very fast." - (P2)

Women have been observed to have a higher risk of developing posttraumatic stress symptoms after a disaster compared to men (Yazawa et al., 2022). However, as informants described, women shouldering the burden of caregiving and household management resulted in them being unable to experience and express their trauma. Consequently, women neglected their own fundamental needs (Walia, 2015). (P6), from ‘We Need to Talk’ NGO in Türkiye working on fighting against period poverty and menstruation stigma, described that while they were visiting the container/tent cities and providing menstruation kits, they asked women about their menstrual cycles. Thinking about their menstrual cycle led to women checking in on their bodies and focusing on themselves, which was a rare opportunity. As a result of this simple question, (P6) recounted that women would get the chance to reflect upon their needs.

There are various intersectional challenges faced by certain groups, including women with disabilities and migrants. These survivors had to navigate through layers of discrimination and exclusion. According to UNDP⁷, as many as 70 percent of injured earthquake survivors are expected to have a disability. Disaster research has found that women with disabilities encounter gender-specific marginalization, as stereotypes historically depicting women as weak, naive, passive, and dependent are magnified for this group, leading to their social invisibility (Gartrell et al., 2020). The social enterprise focused on redesigning accessibility experiences for people with disabilities ‘Erişilebilir Her Şey’ (Everything Accessible) was one of the entities providing support in the post-earthquake context. (P7), from ‘Erişilebilir Her Şey’, described that people with disabilities grappled with multiple layers of trauma, and women with disabilities experienced a more severe level of marginalization. She noted that as they provided training in the field to help individuals who had become disabled after the earthquake, they saw that women tried to accept their new situation and adapt quickly and had started looking for solutions and coping mechanisms.

“There was acceptance in women, and immediately they started to ponder, ‘I don't have a leg, but I have children, and I have to take care of them’. Women’s workload increased, and we had cases where they said, ‘I'm in a container; I don't know how I'm going to clean it with one arm only.’ The fact that a woman is disabled increases her

⁷ UNDP (2023) Recovery and Reconstruction after the 2023 Earthquakes in Türkiye, UNDP offer and proposed projects. Available at: <https://www.undp.org/Türkiye/publications/recovery-and-reconstruction-after-2023-earthquakes-Türkiye-undp-project-catalogue>

challenges. She says she must go shopping, she must cook, but she can't do any of it.”
- (P7)

Migrants face multidimensional challenges in times of disaster, and these challenges include language barriers, lack of access to information, limited social networks, substandard living, and discrimination⁸. Approximately 1.7 million Syrian migrants live in the provinces affected by the earthquake⁹. There are numerous studies that have researched discrimination against Syrian migrants in Türkiye prior to the earthquake (Alp, 2018; Tümtaş, 2018, Çoksan and Özkan, 2024) however there is a limited number of studies addressing the problems or discrimination experienced by Syrian migrants, more specifically Syrian women, after the earthquake. Ekici’s study (2024) found that after the earthquake, Turkish citizens were given priority in shelter assistance and in aid distribution, which migrants saw as discrimination. Syrian migrants reported experiencing hate speech and exclusion from essential services, especially when they did not speak Turkish (ibid.).

Among the informants interviewed, only two NGO representatives had worked with migrants in the earthquake locations, and they noted that the women migrants who experienced the earthquake faced discrimination. (P6) described that Syrian women were accused of being ‘dirty’ and were also, at times, subject to humiliation during aid distributions. Due to the prejudice and discrimination, Syrian earthquake survivors were marginalized, and being ‘women’ created an additional layer of vulnerability for them.

“Syrian women said "We are not dirty, we know hygiene. During aid distribution, I was yelled at while taking an extra for my neighbor".” - (P6)

“In the feminist tent, the common misconceptions about Syrians that were believed to be true were also perpetuated by Turkish women survivors. They believed the prejudice that Syrians steal, that they are dirty. Syrian women feel this discrimination.” - (P8)

⁸ WHO (2023) Refugee and Migrant Health. Available at: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/refugee-and-migrant-health> (Accessed April 29, 2024)

⁹ Refugees Association (2024) Number of Syrians in Turkey January. Available at: <https://multeciler.org.tr/Türkiyedeki-suriyeli-sayisi/> (Accessed March 16, 2023)

5.2 Women's Solidarity and Empowerment in Post-Disaster Recovery

Turkish society is described as a society with strong feelings of unity and solidarity, typical of traditional societies, with collective consciousness rather than individualism (Erdoğan, 2023). Immediately after the earthquakes, NGOs, and companies from other parts of Türkiye rushed to the earthquake locations to provide resources and support. The key informants interviewed in this study provided various types of support to earthquake survivors through their organizations: provision of mental health and psychosocial support, provision of vocational training to women, running a voluntary kitchen providing meals to survivors, provision of support and information sessions on menstruation and disabilities, provision of aid through the distribution of non-food items. Through these services, the key informants had the opportunity to interact with the survivors. They described that with the destruction and the loss of lives, all kinds of support and services were needed during the response phase. Afterward, during the recovery phase, the support shifted towards reconstruction, restoring livelihoods, and community development. In this phase, through the work of organizations providing spaces and means for women's empowerment and through the already existing platforms of local women, women's solidarity was expressed, resulting in economic and psychological empowerment of women, as well as community development. The following section will explain these processes.

In post-disaster contexts, women's multiple responsibilities are outlined as 'triple burden' outlined by Moser (1993) as being a reproductive role (related to domestic tasks and childbearing), a productive role (related to paid work), and a community managing role (unpaid volunteer work for the good of the community). In our case, women's reproductive role had increased exponentially right after the disaster, which was described in the previous section. Meanwhile, women's productive and community-managing roles started to become more apparent as the recovery and reconstruction phases started.

One such example of women's productive role was given by the informant (P1), who worked closely with the tailoring initiative led by a public education teacher who recognized the dire need for financial income among women in the aftermath of the disaster. That public education teacher mobilized resources and support through social media and started a project to encourage women to produce by providing them with the tools and materials needed. Through

initiatives of embroidering towels and crafting bags, women were able to access a source of income and regain a sense of purpose. Similarly, Borusan Holding¹⁰ prioritized psychosocial support and financial gain, and they initiated a bag-knitting project with the earthquake survivor women; the volunteers gathered and learned how to knit bags. These bags were then sold online to people all over Türkiye, establishing a sustainable source of income for women. The representative of this bag-knitting project (P2) described:

“We started with one woman first, then we invited others who could also knit. We asked for a certain number of bags from them to set them a goal. Then, they organized among themselves and started to prepare tea, coffee, and food while they were knitting together. They started to earn more than the minimum wage.”

Creating opportunities for women to come together and simultaneously provide for themselves and their dependents while in each other's company is an important act of supporting the growth of feminist solidarity (Sweetman, 2013). At the time of the interview, Borusan Holding's initiative, represented by (P2), had 55 participating women, and they were receiving orders from big companies such as Halkbank, a bank in Türkiye. They were also learning how to embroider bags and make candles. (P2) described that through participating in this initiative, many women became the sole breadwinners in their homes, which gave them a sense of empowerment and agency.

“We have one mother participant whose son is studying medicine, and ever since she started, she has been sending money to her son, she is feeling very proud and happy. In the past, it was her husband who used to provide for their son. Now, it's her.”

This quote also shows women's decision-making power regarding how they spend the money they earn, which is an essential domain of agency (Hanmer and Klugman, 2016).

Another similar initiative was described by (P5), a key informant who had started a basket-knitting workshop for women, which quickly turned into a livelihood and empowerment opportunity for them. She noted that once they gathered women who already knew how to knit

¹⁰ Borusan Holding is an Istanbul-based group of companies operating in steel, distribution, energy and logistics in Türkiye and worldwide.

baskets and those who did not know but wanted to learn, they received the materials as donations from private companies, they taught each other how to knit baskets, and then (P5) as the founder of the workshop, searched for potential customers. Hotels and hospitals from all over Türkiye started to buy the baskets. She described,

“The women we had in our workshop had never earned money for their work before; they were housewives. About one and a half months later, they started earning money, and we saw that they created social media pages themselves to promote the baskets. Bringing income to the family, being able to take care of their family members, gave the women confidence and hope.” – (P5)

While the creation of livelihood opportunities and sources of income was very important, similar to the other reported initiatives, women found this process empowering. Kabeer (2008) notes that women's agency leads to empowerment when it questions, challenges, or changes regressive norms that perpetuate the subordination of women. As (P5) described, in their workshops, there were women who had never worked before as they were housewives, and once they earned money, made decisions on how to spend the money and shared their strength and experience with each other by teaching each other skills, they realized what they were able to do.

As a result of women gathering in the workshop, teaching each other how to knit and creating social media pages to promote their products, they learned entrepreneurship as (5) reported that the workshop participants used some of their income to invest in themselves, *“They bought separate materials, they started to produce other products, it was as if this workshop light the fuse and they were eager to continue.”* Sweetman (2013) notes that through economic activities done by women together as a group where the profits of larger scale production and joint marketing yield better returns than income-generating as individuals, an opportunity is created to work together, which will lead to collective actions to further women's strategic interests as a marginalized economic and social group. This was the case for (5)'s project, with women taking collective action among themselves to buy materials and invest in themselves to expand their business and earnings.

Women also took a community managing role, with a key informant (P4), who is a journalist, describing that women were eager to produce. She noted that there were a lot of cases of women doing what could be traditionally classified as ‘men’s work’, such as carpentry. *“There was an initiative of building wooden houses and most of the workers were women. These wooden houses that they built could be bought and donated, which provided income opportunities for earthquake survivor women.”* Other initiatives included private companies or NGOs opening bakeries, where earthquake survivor women gathered. They started to bake bread and send it to remote neighborhoods who needed it.

Agriculture is one of the main sectors in the earthquake regions, and almost all women employed in the agriculture sector work as unpaid family workers¹¹. Successive earthquakes have not only destroyed houses but also barns and wiped out livestock. Machinery and equipment used in agriculture were also damaged. One informant (P9) who works in an NGO focused on women’s entrepreneurship explained that it was very important to focus on agriculture to revitalize the economy in the region.

“Women in rural areas in the earthquake-affected regions were involved in livestock farming, dairy production, fruit production, cotton farming, olive oil production, and the earthquakes interrupted their activities. However, since the agricultural lands and farms were not damaged, women farmers were looking for opportunities to get back to business.” – (P9)

Feminist Political Ecology perspective emphasizes the agency of women in resource-dependent communities, and in this case, through FPE, attention is directed to rural women who had been involved in unpaid farming work and how they act in disaster situations with capacity and will (Kimura and Katano, 2014) As Hatay is a region famous for their local food products, some organizations provided the kitchens and materials for women who started producing pomegranate syrup, canned food, jam, pickles. (P4) described, *“These women gathered naturally. They thought about what they could do. When the organizations visited*

¹¹ UN Women (2023) Brief on Earthquakes in Türkiye: Impacts and Priorities for Women and Girls: Available at: https://eca.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/UN%20Women%20Brief%20on%20Earthquake%20in%20Türkiye%20Gendered%20impacts%20and%20response_0.pdf

them, they said that they could bake, they could cook, and once the right support was provided, women mobilized on their own.”

Women cooperatives took an active role, starting initiatives and projects for the earthquake zone to ensure the continuation of production in the region, targeting women farmers. Indeed, (P9) expressed that there were financial support packages to women cooperatives, aiming to work with women as they acknowledged their increased vulnerabilities. As (P9) described, Halkbank conducted interviews with cooperatives in the region and found that women's cooperatives do not want to leave the regions where they operate, and they launched Women's Cooperatives Support Loan and KGF Guaranteed Women Entrepreneur Support Loan in the earthquake zone¹².

Apart from the acts of producing and creating, women's solidarity also emerged in feminist tents that were created. These tents were created by feminist organizations with women and children in mind. (P8), whose organization put up a feminist tent in a container city in Hatay, explained that the tents were created as a space for women to gather and express their needs, a location where they felt 'safe'. From a feminist point of view, women gathering and being in groups offers an alternative social network for them which helps them break free from the dependence on traditional social structures such as family, marriage, and household roles (Sweetman, 2013). Through sharing their experiences and supporting each other, women can challenge their isolation, shed light on injustices, and raise hopes for transformative shifts in gender dynamics (ibid.).

“The feminist tent was created so that women could come and express their needs. Women felt safe there. They finish their caregiving work in the evening and come to the women's tent, where they chat and share stories. It is necessary to create a space where women can come together. They say it feels good to gather around and sit together.” - (P8)

The creation of such spaces was also extremely important for people with disabilities. Gartrell et al. (2020) note that in the absence of formal support, women with disabilities have few

¹² Dunya (2023) Women producers in the earthquake zone will get back on their feet with Halkbank. Available at: <https://www.dunya.com/sirketler/deprem-bolgesindeki-kadin-ureticiler-halkbank-ile-yeniden-ayaga-kalkacak-haberi-687678>

choices but to rely upon the social capital of their households and neighbors for assistance. Therefore, it was very important to acknowledge the existence of women with disabilities and providing them with the support they needed. Another tent for women and children with disabilities was created, and (P7) explained that women who were in dire situations gathered in the tents; the solidarity they experienced improved their mental state and helped them overcome their trauma.

"Women who were disabled after the earthquake have a lot of challenges; they are waiting for a prosthesis, the prosthesis came, but it is not compatible with them... We gathered such women in the tents; they asked each other things such as 'When was yours cut off.' They started to talk about such a painful thing so easily, which helped them in their trauma." - (P7)

Feminist consciousness and solidarity can develop from providing acutely resource-poor women with opportunities to meet and evolve strategies for collective action (Sweetman, 2013). By providing women with disabilities the spaces to meet, (P7) described how they had started discussions about making Hatay more accessible and taking collective action with the municipality to ensure their needs were considered. *"During the reconstruction phase, they want to ensure that urban areas are accessible to all disability groups. Women want cafes and public education centers to be accessible."* She emphasized how these women's collective action can create a new Hatay that is much more disability-sensitive and accessible compared to how it was previously.

Local women's groups also played an important part in coordinating and mobilizing resources to support affected communities. (P6) explained that in Hatay, prior to the earthquake, there were women's groups that regularly organized meetups for socializing and they communicated through WhatsApp. After the earthquake, these WhatsApp groups served as an effective solidarity network. These groups offered a space where women can come together to share experiences, exchange information, and mobilize resources to address the needs of their communities. In fact, NGOs that arrived outside of Hatay, made use of these groups and leveraged women's knowledge of the community.

“Local women's groups were our contact point. They directed us to the right neighborhoods. These women-only WhatsApp groups turned into an effective solidarity network.” - (P6)

Women solidarity groups played a vital role in post-disaster recovery efforts, as emphasized by all interview participants. Apart from producing and creating, earning income, and investing in themselves, their family, or their communities, women also raised hope and impacted their close ones. Women’s solidarity groups had a direct positive impact on their empowerment. Through collective action, they felt a sense of empowerment that Kabeer (1994, p. 245) explains as follows:

“From a state of powerlessness that manifests itself in a feeling of "I cannot", empowerment contains an element of collective self-confidence that results in a feeling of "we can'."

Women who had not been able to work or provide for their families prior to the earthquake were able to earn income; women who had been stuck at home shouldering caregiving responsibilities had the opportunity to discover their talents and achieve a sustainable livelihood opportunity. Furthermore, the process of organizing in these groups became a learned skill. One key informant (P1), described that women learned how to take collective action, coming together to support one another and advocate for the communities’ needs. Similar to that sentiment (P4) described that through the women groups, as women started to produce and create, they felt hopeful about the future, their mental health improved, and their self-confidence increased. (P4) expressed that through the women’s solidarity groups and the empowerment that women achieved through their activities, ten women in ten neighborhoods of Samandağ in Hatay had decided to become candidates for mukhtarships. This is important as women are underrepresented in political decision-making in the affected provinces – only 2 out of 135 mayors (11 provincial and 124 districts) are women, and the ratio of women municipal councilors is around 10%¹³.

¹³ UN Women (2023) Brief on Earthquakes in Türkiye: Impacts and Priorities for Women and Girls: Available at: https://eca.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/UN%20Women%20Brief%20on%20Earthquake%20in%20Türkiye%20Gendered%20impacts%20and%20response_0.pdf

“This year, ten women in ten neighborhoods of Samandağ applied to become mukhtars, a campaign was launched for women to be involved in local government. The people of this region believe that women should stay home and take care of the household. Despite that, these women went out to the field and are working to become local leaders, and they are getting a very good reaction from the citizens.” - (P4)

Supporting (P4)’s experiences, (P6) also noted that as a result of women’s solidarity groups and their empowering effects, there was a noticeable increase in civil society awareness, with the number of women’s cooperatives increasing in Hatay. (P6) believed that *“Women’s solidarity created a ripple effect.”* Local women groups got into contact with bigger NGOs and private companies, and women’s small businesses recovered faster compared to men’s as an outcome of women’s willingness to start producing. Among these small businesses, (P6) recounted that women business owners in Hatay recruited fellow earthquake survivors and started offering hairdressing services, handicrafts, and preparing and selling homemade food. In one and a half months, they started marketing their products on social media to be able to reach more customers.

The empowerment of women and women’s solidarity also had a positive ripple effect on their environment. The positive impact of their experiences was reflected in their close friends and family. (P5) described, *“When the mother attended the workshop, her young daughter saw the work her mother was doing. It gave her hope as well. Their daughters also wanted to join, so we had mother-and-daughter sessions.”* It was reported that there was support from men of the family to women who started to become active in the women’s groups. Even in regions where it was traditionally not acceptable for women to work or get out of their houses, men showed support. For women who were earning income, their husbands who had lost jobs offered to help their wives. For instance, key informants (P2) and (P5) who had organized sewing and knitting workshops mentioned that in their workshops, the husbands of the participants had also wanted to join and support their wives in any way they could. The interviews revealed that the traditional norms did not impact women’s solidarity negatively as men were not against the idea of women taking on new roles.

The support from NGOs and private companies impacted women’s solidarity positively. The safe gathering spaces were established for women, and the equipment, materials, and resources

that women needed to start producing were provided by the relevant NGOs or companies active in the area. Especially the partnerships between NGOs and private companies acting as donors were very effective in supporting women's solidarity, and empowerment. NGOs, especially feminist ones, conducted field research and identified the gender-specific needs, providing an opportunity for donors to invest in various initiatives such as providing menstruation products, contraception, mental health, and psychosocial support to women, creating women's tents, providing equipment, material, and vocational training to women.

Some local authorities, such as municipalities, also supported women's initiatives. (P3), a volunteer in the 'Heart Kitchen' women organization, which cooks meals for earthquake survivors, noted that the municipality supported them by sending vehicles and providing electricity, water, and heat for free. However, this was not the same in every municipality. The lack of adequate support by the government towards certain groups was another factor that negatively impacted women's solidarity. One key informant (P4) reported that as a journalist, she had interviews with small-business owner women who had applied to municipalities for support to be able to reopen their businesses, but their requests went unheard. They were able to get the support from NGOs instead.

The local governments' regulations and support were not adequate and often gender blind, which impacted women's solidarity and empowerment negatively, as they posed security and safety problems for women, putting them at risk of violence. For instance, the assignment of families into tents and containers was done based on surnames, which resulted in divorced women being assigned to live together with their ex-husbands. Key informants noted that the government offered temporary financial assistance to families, but it was allocated to the male head of household. This raised concerns about whether women and children received their fair share of the support, as the man had sole authority over withdrawing the funds meant for the entire family. In addition, people with disabilities were also overlooked, with the local authorities having no services targeting them. There was a lack of NGOs focusing on accessibility, and 'Erişilebilir Her Şey' (P7) noted that they had challenges reaching some locations to offer support as they could not obtain permission from the ministry.

"There was no data on how many women with disabilities there were, and there were no organizations working on accessibility. The state left people alone. For example, we

could not reach the tent/container cities as you need the ministry's permission to provide services, and we did not get permission. We were unable to reach people there, and there were many NGOs who faced similar challenges." - (P7)

5.3 Development Aid Strategies

To respond to the fourth research question, taking a development practitioner lens, during the interviews, I also discussed policy implications and development aid strategies that NGOs and donors can take into consideration to support earthquake survivor women in Türkiye and beyond. The strategies offer opportunities in post-disaster recovery efforts with a particular focus on women's solidarity, empowerment, and sustainability.

As all nine informants were involved with NGOs or women's organizations, they highlighted the prevalence of temporary employment opportunities and the lack of sustainable, long-term income-generating activities. During the post-disaster context, many university graduates have been hired temporarily and then let go, contributing to economic instability in the region. This is also related to the lack of funding and resources, which impacts the ability of organizations to sustain their efforts over the long term. While initiatives such as vocational training and employment programs have been implemented, there is a need for more comprehensive strategies to ensure lasting economic stability and empowerment, especially for women. (P4) noted:

"In the initial stages, women cooperatives, NGOs, and civil organizations showed promise but are now striving to regain sustainability. Supporting women's business initiatives is essential for Hatay's recovery. Cooperatives require professional guidance to overcome challenges and expand their operations." (P4)

Informants also highlighted the importance of addressing the specific needs of vulnerable groups, including women, people with disabilities, and children, in post-disaster reconstruction efforts. (P8) called for greater government intervention and policy reform to address systemic issues such as gender inequality and resource scarcity.

“When rebuilding communities, it's essential to consider the diverse needs of women, the disabled, and children. Gender equality in public policies is crucial for women to fully participate in the workforce. However, current policies often place the burden of caregiving on women, reinforcing gender disparities. This highlights a systemic issue where the state shifts responsibility onto women, undermining efforts for gender equality.” (P8)

To ensure that women’s solidarity and empowerment are sustainable in the earthquake regions, it is necessary to make structural changes. Kabeer (2003, p. 175) notes:

“Individual empowerment is an important starting point for processes of social transformation, but unless it leads to some form of structural change, it will do little to undermine the systemic reproduction of inequality”.

What (P8) called for and described is in line with Masselot (2022), noting that strongly embedding equality and care values in the legal framework of a country is likely to set the tone for actions and decisions in relation to disaster preparedness, planning, and management. She emphasized that raising gender equality in society represents the first step towards equality in disaster preparedness and mitigating the loss of life and harm to women. Informants, such as (P6), (P8), and (P9) noted the oversight from authorities, describing that gendered vulnerabilities were overlooked, with (P8) emphasizing the need for child-care centers in tents, container cities, noting that women’s care work was accepted as the norm. Masselot (2022) also noted the challenges of applying a formal equality approach, highlighting that it often relies on male standards as the benchmark. She argued that male norms are not only considered the norm but are also perceived as neutral. Consequently, anti-discrimination measures frequently overlook structural factors that perpetuate disadvantages for vulnerable groups.

To summarize, development aid strategies to support earthquake survivor women in Türkiye and beyond describe the need for adequate funding and resources to create sustainable employment opportunities, ensuring long-term income for individuals rather than temporary contracts. Similarly, sustainable business models are necessary for women’s cooperatives or organizations to ensure that their products are bought so that the women involved can have a sustainable income. Development aid organizations could prioritize grants and financial

support for grassroots initiatives, ensuring that resources are allocated effectively to meet the needs of vulnerable populations. They could provide support for women-led initiatives, such as food production and marketing projects, to ensure sustainability and growth.

Furthermore, to ensure social and structural changes that promote gender equality, social inclusion, and long-term development, reconstruction efforts should prioritize the needs of marginalized groups, including women, people with disabilities, and children. The establishment of safe spaces for women to gather, organize, and access resources is necessary. Development agencies could advocate for such policy changes and support initiatives by ensuring a bottom-up approach and involving local women in the discussions.

6. Discussion and Concluding Remarks

This thesis contributes to disaster studies by providing linkages between disaster and gender in the Türkiye context through women's solidarity and the role it plays in post-disaster recovery. Making use of social vulnerability concepts and feminist political ecology, the thesis investigated how gender shaped women's experiences in the aftermath of the 6th February earthquakes, how women expressed solidarity, the factors impacting this solidarity, and how women's solidarity impacted local community resilience and recovery. Based on the collected data, it also provided development aid strategies to support earthquake survivor women in Türkiye and beyond.

In answering the first question, the study finds that gendered division of labor and societal norms significantly influenced women's experiences post-earthquake in the Türkiye context: women faced disproportionate challenges due to increased caregiving responsibilities, inadequate facilities increased women's vulnerability to violence and health risks, and women with disabilities and migrants faced increased challenges including discrimination, limited access to resources, and increased risks of marginalization. These findings corroborate existing studies of gender and disaster.

In answering the second question, the findings reveal that women's solidarity emerged as a powerful force driving community resilience and recovery. Women's solidarity through livelihood projects enhanced their economic resilience and contributed to the local economy.

Women fostered a sense of collective agency, their solidarity extended to community managing roles and translated into increased political engagement and leadership roles, where women called for more inclusive governance. Local women's groups served as vital networks that strengthened community resilience by leveraging their knowledge, skills, and social capital to address the diverse needs arising from the disaster. In answering the third question, women's solidarity was impacted by various factors, including the level of government support, engagement of NGOs and private sectors, entrenched gender norms, and accessibility barriers. Finally, to answer the third research question, the thesis describes policy implications.

The thesis recognizes the need for additional research into the experiences of certain marginalized groups, such as women and girls with disabilities, sexually or gender diverse (LGBTQ+) women, and migrant women, during both the crisis and recovery phases of disasters. The unique challenges and vulnerabilities faced by these groups should be explored and analyzed to inform more inclusive disaster response and recovery.

Appendix 1

Table 1: Interview Guide

<p>Consent Form</p>	<p>Hello, my name is Melis, I am a student at Lund University, doing my master's in international development and management. I am currently conducting research for my thesis that focuses on women's gendered experiences, women's solidarity and how it impacts the community development, after 6th February earthquakes. I would like to ask you questions on your experience and your observations. The information you provide will be anonymous, I will not provide your identity and I will only use this information for my thesis. In order to facilitate the discussion, I would like to take notes and record your audio. This discussion will not last more than one hour.</p> <p>Do you understand and consent to participate in this discussion?</p>
<p>Introductory Questions</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I would like to start by getting to know you, what is your name, age and occupation? 3. What are your thoughts about the social fabric in earthquake zones, either from your own experiences, from what you have read, from research you have done, etc. (For example, in terms of gender equality, women's employment status, economic and educational level...) 4. After the earthquakes of February 6, how long did you go to which of the cities where the earthquakes occurred? What was the purpose of your visit? 5. (if it was an aid organization) Have you participated in such aid organizations before? 6. Did you work with women earthquake victims in this organization?

<p>Women's Experiences After the Earthquake</p>	<p>7. According to your observations, what did women earthquake survivors experience differently from men after February 6? Examples: in terms of safety, psychological aspects, responsibility...</p> <p>9. Let's talk about post-earthquake recovery and community building activities. Survival, returning to life, attachment to life... within the scope of these processes:</p> <p>9.1 What were the roles of women and men in this process (how was the care of the family, provision of food and other basic needs divided between men and women earthquake survivors?)</p> <p>9.2 How do you think the Turkish family structure influenced behaviors in the aftermath of the earthquake?</p> <p>10. To what extent do cultural and social norms influence women's participation and empowerment in disaster recovery?</p> <p>11. 'Women's unity, women's solidarity' is a phenomenon often seen after natural disasters. In what ways have you seen women come together and show solidarity?</p> <p>12. Let's talk about the mental health of women in this process. What were women's coping strategies in this highly stressful situation? What was the impact of women's solidarity here?</p> <p>13. How did women's solidarity (e.g. the establishment of soup kitchens) emerge in such a crisis? How did this affect the women earthquake survivors who participated?</p> <p>14. Can you describe the versions of women's solidarity that you have witnessed?</p> <p>15. Have you been able to see the empowerment effects of the women involved in this women's solidarity?</p> <p>16. What about how women organizing and engaging in various activities affected men?</p>
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	<p>17. What were the positive or negative influences on women's solidarity (those who helped solidarity, or those who got in the way of women's solidarity)?</p> <p>18. What was the impact of women's solidarity in the earthquake-stricken areas where they lived?</p> <p>19. What role did women's solidarity play in the development and recovery process of these regions?</p>
<p>Aftermath/The Future</p>	<p>19. Do you think this kind of solidarity and empowerment will influence patterns in post-disaster society (gender differences, equality, etc.)?</p> <p>20. What is the long term impact of organizations mobilized by women?</p> <p>21. What can the state, development organizations, both Turkish and foreign, do to support and assist the empowerment and solidarity of women earthquake survivors?</p>

Appendix 2

Table 2: List of Participants

Participant	Occupation
P1	Civil society member
P2	Borusan Holding project representative
P3	Volunteer in 'Heart Kitchen' organization
P4	Journalist
P5	Founder of women's workshop
P6	'We Need To Talk' NGO member
P7	'Erişilebilir Her Şey' (Everything Accessible) social enterprise member
P8	'Women's Human Rights' NGO member
P9	Women's Solidarity and Entrepreneurship NGO member

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