

Keywords

Gender, Disaster Risk Reduction, Gender Mainstreaming, Capacity Development

Popular summary

Disasters do not affect men and women in the same way. Harmful gender norms and inequalities often lead to disproportionate impacts on women and girls, while they also possess important knowledge and skills to support resilience. Today, promoting gender equality in disaster risk reduction (DRR) through gender mainstreaming has become a global priority, yet remains weak in practice.

This thesis examines gender mainstreaming across international DRR projects implemented by the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB) between 2007 and 2017. Through analysis of project documentation and semi-structured interviews with project managers, it explores how gender was addressed in project management, activities, and results aimed at strengthening the disaster risk reduction capacities of targeted organisations, as well as the challenges encountered in mainstreaming gender.

The findings showed that gender mainstreaming was limited to project management methods, such as recruiting female trainers for deployments, promoting the participation of women and men in training, and adopting gender-sensitive facilitation methods. Most projects integrated awareness-raising on gendered needs into technical trainings on risk assessment, emergency response, and early warning. However, the findings indicate that limited efforts were made to identify potential organisational and institutional capacity gaps, and implement stand-alone activities to strengthen partners' capacities to promote gender equality within their organisations and disaster risk reduction programmes.

Project managers identified several challenges in their work to mainstream gender. They explained that gender mainstreaming was often driven by MSB policy commitments or donor requirements rather than partner priorities and support. They also worked primarily with male-dominated organisations, where women were already underrepresented. Furthermore, project managers noted that changing organisational values and cultural norms around gender requires long-term engagement beyond typical project time frames and available resources. In a few larger projects, gender experts were engaged to support needs analysis, the development of training modules and policies, and the monitoring of results. Attitudes towards gender mainstreaming also reportedly differed among project managers, with some placing less emphasis on integrating gender into project outcomes. Finally, the lack of monitoring and evaluation frameworks with gender-sensitive indicators meant that project results and lessons learned were often insufficiently documented.

In conclusion, while gender equality was prioritised by MSB at the policy level, gender mainstreaming in its international DRR capacity development projects was inadequate and externally driven rather than based on a systematic analysis of partners' needs. Individual awareness-raising alone is insufficient without supporting partners to identify and develop the organisational and institutional capacities needed to promote gender equality within their organisations and disaster risk reduction work.