

5 THE RELIEF PHASE RESPONSE TO EMERGENCY AND/OR DISASTER

Survival and spontaneous action

The literature on disaster response gives ample testimony to the strong human will to survive, and to the creativity of people who experience such emergencies. *Relief planning needs to take into account the importance of respect for local spontaneous survival efforts.* Planners should endeavour to assist these efforts rather than compete with them. The effects of Grameen Bank organization among women in Bangladesh show that those who organized were able to recover from flood damage much more effectively than those who did not (Rahman, 1989, 1991). Disasters can provide an opportunity to challenge established discriminatory social orders when the disenfranchised gain access to resources. Organization of women's groups in the context of male political domination and corruption (Martin, 1990) exemplifies the potential of spontaneous creative redefinition of goals.

Women should be encouraged in spontaneous mobilization during the relief phase. This kind of mobilization generates essential solidarity and acts to relieve stress. Mobilization to assist other victims relates positively to community disaster mitigation measures under traumatic events.

Effects of physical and emotional losses

The adverse effects of multiple losses experienced by women, children, and their families are often catastrophic. These effects are exacerbated by an undermined ability to cope with losses. Overall, the human response in relief camps in a disaster situation is full of negative experiences. It is clear that not all displaced people have the ability to withstand the constant turmoil involving them. Nevertheless, it appears that some positive aspects may be derived from the experience of surviving loss. *Distinct behaviours and emotional reactions of people placed in camp environments need to be considered when assisting displaced people during recovery and development.* The identification of what behaviours are shown in which stage of the crisis will help the stress coping processes among families facing multiple losses. Under extreme situations, the mind has proved to possess a remarkable strength in adjusting to unpleasant conditions. If this adjustment response is guided positively, the emotional pain of losses suffered by the people could be significantly reduced (Suedfeld and Mocellin, 1992).

A tool for field officers in camp environments is suggested (see Appendix A). Formulation of "Guidelines for Field Health Workers in Emergencies and Disasters", discussed in the section on Stress and Stressors, should provide valuable data on behaviour of displacees across all phases of disaster response, but particularly during relief and reconstruction.

Relief phase stress

In many emergency situations losses are so severe and traumatic that stress levels interfere with recovery. Widespread subordination of women has meant that women typically must bear more stress than men. *The principal reasons of severe stress for women during the relief phase are physical and sexual assault resulting in severe depression.* Suicide attempts are common in relief camps. Successful pregnancies are considered a severe stressor under relief camp conditions. Living conditions are characterized by an uncertain future for the child, economic pressure, and overcrowding.

An additional stressor is that the primary distribution of food is discriminatory. In areas not deemed politically strategic, people may not be given enough food. Because women are not the agents through which the food is distributed, men may keep the food for themselves. Another severe stressor is prostitution of women in relief camps. Women often engage in prostitution because it provides a source of essential income. In some situations women exchange sexual favours for either food or shelter, becoming mistresses or prostitutes. UNHCR (1991b) suggests possible programme interventions to relieve the problem. Adaptation of these intervention measures to other emergency situations is recommended.

Domestic violence often increases under chronic displacement, when refugees become fully aware of their long-term status in which their hopes for repatriation or resettlement are dashed. Statistics provided by the United Nations Border Relief Operations (UNBRO) indicate that 85% of episodes related to domestic violence were with women. To control for this escalating level of violence, properly supervised security groups might be introduced in large camp environments. Women should be integrated into the supervisory units.

Children are affected by several stressors in the relief phase. The intensity of the stressor may be severe to catastrophic when children have to adapt to life with a single parent or with no parents. In some circumstances orphaned children may be cared for by mature siblings or other close kin. Physical abuse is a natural consequence of frustration among adults, particularly men. Conditions are ideal to support the well-known hypothesis of frustration-aggression. Adults subjected to frequent events leading to deception and frustration project their internal anger in the form of aggression and violence. Children become an easy target to relieve this frustration (McCallin and Fozzard, 1990). *Sexual abuse against children is common.* Because of their immaturity, children do not possess the coping strategies of adults to fight stressors. When exposed to the intra-familial tensions triggered by the redistribution of parental roles and tasks, children are often forced to assume tasks and responsibilities beyond their cognitive and developmental capabilities. They are unable to understand the sudden violence in their families and communities. *Child-abuse preventive measures would be to attempt to provide child support in camp environments by allowing more physical space allocated for recreation, and supporting more programmes that involve children as members of communities.* Unfortunately, the operational difficulties in the implementation of these measures are obstacles to their full application.

Psychosocial adjustment of children demands greater recognition since detrimental effects produced by relief camps will most likely have the greatest long-term effects, affecting their adult lives. Unprocessed trauma has severe effects with reflections into adulthood. "Although the likelihood of developmental problems (e.g., emotional difficulties or learning problems) increases as one is subjected to more risks, the relationship is not necessarily linear. This is because the effect of risk factors can be mitigated by 'protective' factors" (Ager 1992:7). Based on a recent study of refugee women and their families in Malawi, Ager argues that facilitating refugees' networks of social support enhances refugees' own means of coping. He argues that this – "*recruiting indigenous resources*" – is the key to providing for vulnerable refugee children (Ager 1992:7).

Women's own elevated levels of stress may contribute to problems with their children. A vicious cycle of inappropriate responses to needs of children may be set in motion by the mother's own unmet emotional needs (McCallin and Fozzard, 1990:16). McCallin and Fozzard (1990:23-28) say that one of the most significant factors emerging from their recent study of refugees from Mozambique is the level of trauma experienced by women. Daily life events can be stressful, but their effect is compounded by experience of trauma. Mothers reported a considerable range of stress-related behaviours in their children. They note significant relationship between traumatic events experienced by children and the incidence of stress-related behaviours. The mothers' own experiences may make them unaware or unresponsive to their children's behaviour, however. Consequently, it may go unreported. It should be noted from their study that religious affiliation and presence of supportive family members were associated with lower scores on the stress assessment schedule.

Health professionals should give more and prolonged attention, beyond the care provided during the crisis phase, to relief of the combined and harmful action of stressors on people, particularly on women and children. The simple expansion of medical and/or psychiatric services in refugee camps is not as effective as a combination of Western medicine with traditional medicine and healing practices. Adoption of traditional medicine and healing practices is beneficial and comforting because it incorporates the sociocultural belief system of the particular group.

Role of women in food distribution

Women have a prominent role in the control and distribution of food in most societies. In many, they have a pivotal role. *Agencies should make a concerted effort to channel food assistance primarily through women.* This is likely to result in a more equitable distribution that would reach children in particular, and the most needy in general.

Achievement of this objective will not be easy in many situations, for reasons addressed throughout this study. Food assistance comes through governments and external agencies. *Women in many disaster-prone areas are strongly discouraged or forbidden from interacting with official entities.* Furthermore, manipulation of food aid is lucrative business for mid-level

entrepreneurs tied to state officials in systems of patronage (see Hartmann and Boyce, 1979).

Efforts to channel food aid through women are more likely to succeed if they build on spontaneous or introduced women's organizations. In Bangladesh, some poor women in solidarity with others have successfully resisted efforts by local power brokers and moneylenders to gain control of their meagre resources.

Assistance priorities

While each disaster context will have unique characteristics, there should be certain general assistance priorities. *Attention should first be given to provide physical and legal protection to the most vulnerable, including women and children.* If assistance for this basic need is delayed or neglected, serious abuses are perpetuated or even aggravated in the crisis and post-crisis phases. It is always essential that protection and assistance programmes to all communities affected be seen as components of effective durable solutions. It is within this context that the UNHCR Guidelines "Sectoral Checklists for Refugee Women and Children" (1991a) need to be understood. Although these guidelines were primarily premised to address the situation of refugee women and children, they could easily be adapted to provide similar protection and assistance strategies in the case of other displaced women and children in emergency situations. Appendix C contains summary information on the work UNHCR has been doing since 1985 to focus attention on refugee women and children in the coordination of policies for protection and assistance.

Assistance with physical needs for temporary shelter, water, food, and sanitation also has high priority. Depending on circumstances, first aid and treatment of common diseases can be immediate concerns as well. Priority should be given to stress reduction, although effective administration of the above priorities would reduce stress considerably.

6 RECONSTRUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT PHASE FOLLOWING AN EMERGENCY AND/OR DISASTER

Operational and political considerations

Development planning and initiatives need to be grounded in thorough knowledge of local social organization and production systems. *Research information for development initiatives should be available on such issues as family organization, gender relations, division of labour, land tenure systems, political organization, legal systems, and religious beliefs.* Ideally, this would involve a comprehensive anthropological or sociological analysis. Likewise, environmental assessments would provide planners and developers with a better understanding of production strengths and limitations. Every effort should be made to assure local input into assessments and planning. Women should be drawn into the process to the fullest. The UNHCR (1991b) has made strongly positive recommendation for the integration of women, or "mainstreaming", in part so not to waste effective skills and labour. Thorn (1991:55) argues for access by women to vital information for their livelihood and for the reduction of over-dependency on UN and NGO agencies.

Development planning that is truly in the interest of those it is meant to help will inevitably encounter obstacles. Wilson (1992:11) points out that "Programmes for the vulnerable, especially women, can challenge community processes and refugee leadership, leading to dramatic failures on occasion". Obviously, full integration of women would be best achieved if the society were convinced that anything less would be a loss. It is critically important to consider the impact of local-level and national politics on communities, and on women and children in particular. *The empowerment of women for the betterment of their societies can come only with concessions from the established power structure within developing countries.*

Most developing countries are thoroughly enmeshed in the global economy. *International aid is part of the complex interaction of forces used to maintain control over strategic resources and regions* (see Kinyanjui, 1991; McAfee, 1990). Both governmental and non-governmental organizations have their own agendas. These also need to be understood and assessed critically. Therefore, a perspective that accommodates local development problems in a global model is more likely to arrive at an accurate assessment of the needs of women and children in emergencies.

Costs are always a factor in development planning and initiatives. A great portion of the cost of development assistance goes to maintain the development planning infrastructure of donor countries and the political establishment of host countries. Given the above operational and political considerations, *small-scale efforts launched by relatively small-scale organizations and targeted to grass-roots local organizations are most successful.*

Access to resources

Shelter

Once relief assistance is provided to meet the basic needs of shelter, food, health and clothing, women and children as members of the larger community are often able to construct more sustainable types of shelter using locally produced materials. Access to such materials as poles, thatch from grass, bricks and other forms of support, will determine in part their rate of success in construction projects. Rural women and children usually participate in hut construction with male members of the family. However, urban women and children may not participate readily due to assumptions governing male/female labour division in home construction projects. *With building resources, credit, and some support, women have a better chance of being integrated into the construction of emerging communities after disasters or the upgrading of marginal settlements.* Different cultural expectations and local conditions need to be taken into account. For example, in some societies women may marry in order to gain access to a house.

Land and/or livestock

Even before becoming displaced and impoverished by disasters, most women are often marginalized from ownership of land and livestock. Nonetheless, disaster reconstruction offers opportunities for new social and political alignments and reorganization of access to resources. In emergency settlements, women and children allotted small plots of land have been able to cultivate and produce food crops. In some case, livestock such as pigs, goats and poultry have been supplied within income-generation projects. These have provided sources of meat, eggs and milk for the families. In turn, they have improved nutritional intakes considerably. *Many settlements which reached food self-sufficiency in Africa used the agricultural background of displaced women and children.* Hence, they have played a significant role in feeding their families, often weaning themselves from settlement food rations. Thorn's study on Cambodian refugees shows that returnee women's access to land may not always offer adequate security in the absence of a viable traditional labour force based on kin groups. The cost of hiring labour is beyond the means of most woman-headed households. They consequently have to give up their land. "Given these disadvantages, returnee women are likely to have to turn to other activities to generate income for themselves and their families (Thorn, 1991:50).

Raw materials

In some emergency settlements, women have been exposed to income-generating projects. In the refugee settlements in Somalia, palm leaves were supplied by the UNHCR to refugee women to produce mats for the compounds. These mats were in turn sold to other displacees, providing income to enable the women to purchase food and other items. *Women and girls who participated in income-generating projects gained economic independence, improved self-esteem, social recognition and dignity.* They were also able to send their children

to school. Raw materials, including seeds and other agricultural inputs for farming projects, are essential to improving the economic position of women in certain emergencies. This is particularly true in the case of female-headed households. Provision of such inputs motivates them to cultivate land and become self-sufficient in food, consequently decreasing their vulnerability.

Equipment and appropriate technology

Increased economic independence of women and children in emergencies tends to promote their social status. *Providing relevant equipment and affordable appropriate technology is essential to the livelihood of families, especially for widows, orphans, and female-headed households.* Once their basic needs have been met, women and youth have been able to mobilize widely. They have organized cooperative ventures for community grinding mills; administering water rationing around community water wells; making bricks out of local materials for hut construction; and establishment of community schools.

Appropriate technology is not capital intensive. It is thus more affordable. Because it is more labour intensive, it offers participatory work for those benefitting from it. Finally, it is more capable of being maintained by local users or local specialists. *While satisfying the technological needs of the community, projects involving appropriate technology can increase work opportunities beyond the assisted women and youth.* In this way, community empowerment may be realized.

Access to employment

Employment opportunities for displaced women and children in the recovery and reconstruction phase should be an essential component of the assistance package. In the 1980s the International Labour Organization (ILO) provided training and access to community and women-specific projects in Somalian refugee camps. In some camps, women produced mats. Others were involved in poultry-rearing or in school-construction projects. Economic empowerment of women and children in emergencies is essential if they are to perform a leading role in mobilizing the entire community for active participation in community recovery and development programmes. According to Berar-Awad (1984), the main objective of assistance to women-headed households is to avoid "the dependency syndrome" and help this group achieve the self-reliance needed by proposing a range of socially and economically viable activities.

Development policies have too often been imposed on people by well-meaning researchers and governments. Anthropologist Frank Salomon, who has studied a weaving-farming economy in Guatemala, suggests that we "cease thinking of how to manage other peoples' livelihoods, and ... *begin thinking how livelihood can become less a matter of management and more a fruit of local creativity*" (cited in Peterson, 1984).

Access to training

Many otherwise productive income-generating projects for refugees and displaced persons are discontinued. This often results from a lack of participant training in necessary administrative and technical skills for project management. Hall (1988) observed that, notwithstanding the positive experiences that displaced women enjoyed through participating in the projects discussed earlier, it was evident that more women and girls needed training and education to reach levels of sustainable self-sufficiency. *Even though they have a vital interest in the organization and distribution of supplies, resources and services, displaced women are rarely involved in decision-making in the camps.* Camp officials at all levels are invariably male. Men are usually responsible for every aspect of the camp's administration. They therefore control the allocation of resources, including employment opportunities provided by aid agencies (Hall, 1988:9).

For recovery programmes to be meaningful for women and children in emergencies, women need to be involved in programme identification, planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. Training and education need to be offered to promote community responsibility and ownership of development projects (IDRC, 1984:29-30). This applies especially to technical vocational programmes with an emphasis on maintenance and repair of grinding mills, water wells, pumps, and pit latrines.

Stress in the reconstruction and development phase

The reconstruction and development phase is characterized by some of the same problems noted in previous phases. Women are obviously affected by their children's death, usually caused by disease. Their spouses also may die, mostly due to wars. Women can fall ill, incapacitating them in their care-giving role. They can also fall prey to physical abuse by a frustrated spouse. *Women may be abandoned by their husbands, experience unwanted pregnancy, poverty, malnutrition, and unemployment, or a lack of employment possibilities.* Consequently, hopelessness becomes widespread in camp environments (Wingö, 1990). It is sometimes associated with the fear of not being selected for resettlement, among other reasons (e.g., McCallin and Fozzard, 1991).

Because of the general helplessness and hopelessness of their parents, children tend to incorporate negative experiences into their reality during the crucial period of their development. As the length of stay in camps increases, hopelessness and helplessness also increases. If the children are orphans or cared for by a single parent, their sense of distress increases. *Because parents or care-takers are too busy in low-production activities, normal attention to children is often neglected.* Children may be physically abused, or suffer from certain diseases aggravated by malnutrition and lack of food.

The reconstruction and development phase has characteristics similar to the pre-disaster phase. The severity of stressors ranges from mild to severe. Most of the stressors are of an emotional or inter-personal family nature. Conflict with spouses and other family members

generates an ongoing tension. This conflict is often due to discriminatory attitudes in the new settlement and/or among developers of these settings. *The situation may not improve unless support groups are formed, organizing women in associations.* These associations can assist in socio-economic issues related to alternative sources of income and credit access, task-sharing, and moral support to achieve common goals.

Children are affected by the misconceptions of planners and developers who often forget that children may have production roles unfamiliar to planners and developers. Often they are already involved in food production systems. This fact needs to be taken into account by planners.

Role of women in reconstruction and development

Recent literature on the role of women emphasizes the dominance of development processes by men. Women remain marginal to the process. During recovery periods from disasters, with critical support and planning, women have been able to carry out community mobilization for recovery programmes in developing countries. *In many instances, after gaining economic independence through income-generating projects, women have been largely instrumental in promoting youth projects.* Thus, their mobilization capacity has been increased through their economic empowerment (see Stølen and Vaa, 1991).

Rathgeber (1991) draws attention to the different attitudes of men and women toward the environment. She acknowledges that little systematic research has been done on how women interact with environment and natural resources. In the emerging concern with environmental degradation, its immediate effect on women's work and livelihood has gained attention. There is some indication, Rathgeber points out, that "women tend to take a longer term view, measuring the cost of environmental destruction and loss of agricultural lands against the short-term benefits of male employment" (1991:7).

It is essential for assistance programmes to women and children in emergencies to have diversified packages. Not all displaced people or refugees are from rural uneducated backgrounds. *Assistance programmes should not assume that agricultural projects are the only answer for all refugee and displaced women and children.* Often, temporary and older settlements that were evaluated have revealed that, even though coming from rural areas, not all displaced persons and refugees had previously engaged in agricultural production (Harrell-Bond, 1986). The Thorn (1991:73) study previously cited makes a similar argument. Her study also shows that displaced women with handicapped husbands who were being trained in new skills were the most sensitive women to agricultural knowledge as well as the potential of other options. She argues that if vulnerable woman-headed households are to take control over their lives again, it is vital that they be given access to information about training options and about their homeland (Thorn, 1991:55). Most importantly, programmes to assist women and children in emergencies should always be designed to effect durable solutions (UNHCR, 1991b).

The degrees of vulnerability among women and children in emergencies differ considerably. Orphans, disabled, elderly, pregnant and lactating women, and widows often require assistance on a sustained basis, whereas able-bodied women and children can be supported up to the point where they achieve food and economic self-sufficiency. These distinctions are important in determining the types and levels of support (Rogge, 1987). Often, refugees and displaced persons are aware of such intricacies themselves. More local knowledge and wisdom needs to be incorporated into recovery and development planning, particularly as they relate to women and children in emergencies.

McCallin and Fozzard (1990:37) argue in favour of a *community model*, rather than a mental health or sickness model in assisting the displaced. They propose working within existing structures, incorporating activities to address psychosocial needs, instead of establishing new structures specifically to address mental health issues. "... [T]he dynamics of the individual situation can influence the outcome of a project, and further allows for the integration of the project into existing community development activities". "There should be a willingness to work 'with' rather than 'for' refugee communities" (1990:41).

It is now widely accepted that women are not only responsible for attending to the basic needs of their children and families, but also account significantly for productive and income-generating activities in their respective communities (Boserup, 1970; Lele, 1986; Moffat, 1990). In the situation of refugees, women have demonstrated their capacities as income-earners, producers and managers of food production, providers of fuel and water, participants in cultural, religious and political activities (United Nations General Assembly, 1990).

When designing protection and assistance programmes for women and children under emergencies, it is therefore essential for planners to broaden the concept of women's status from the narrow conceptualization as daughter/mother/wife.

The disadvantage of wasting female human resources is underscored in the following sections. Suggestions are offered to ameliorate the marginalized position of women in development efforts.

Need for training in non-agricultural skills

Usually there is quick recognition of the economic contribution of displacees and refugees in countries where local unemployment and economic recession are not immediate problems, and where the local population's educational, shelter and health needs are already being met. However, the individual status of displaced women depends on a variety of factors, including culture, changing modes of production (particularly in agriculture where women feature most), the availability of public services, political instability, employment opportunities, impact of migration, and communication systems. *To be successful, whether in the country of origin or that of asylum, rural development has to view women and children as cash income-earners and non-agricultural producers in order to open training facilities,*

particularly in technical vocational areas. It is often relatively easier for urban displaced women to adapt in the host countries as refugees, because in most cases they are better educated, are articulate in the official languages of the country, and have marketable skills that are actually or potentially suited to the labour market needs. Where they are not absorbed in the labour market, however, they end up in the marginal settlements on the periphery of large cities. This increases the incidence and magnitude of problems related to such settlements (POPLINE, 1991a:3).

Rural displaced women generally have less mobility in the categories of employment opportunities. When lack of land, lack of training opportunities and lack of credit facilities exist, they are faced with virtually nothing. Where training of women has been offered, positive results have accrued (see Thorn, 1991). The entire displaced population as well as the surrounding local communities may benefit from training programmes for women. *For instance, one health practitioners' training project coordinated between the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Ministry of Health (MOH) of Somalia trained 1,200 women as community health workers to service refugee settlements and surrounding communities* (Hancock, 1988).

Effective participation in affected communities: from preparedness to reconstruction

Communities affected by both natural disasters and conflict-induced displacement display common features of disruptive social organization and dysfunctional economic production. The situation is aggravated by the increasing magnitude and frequency of disasters. These problems are partially attributable to the growth and concentration of population in large cities with a deterioration of public services.

In many communities women typically have a strong involvement in new community groups. There they can be used effectively as mobilizers. According to the San Jose, Costa Rica, OPS/OMS report (1990) on the role of women in preparedness and emergency, there are three phases for women to intervene at the community level: in preparedness and mitigation; in relief; and in rehabilitation. The following is a summary of this OPS report.

In a pre-disaster situation, women should be mobilized in their own communities (see Burns, 1989). Women's groups could identify and diminish their risks and vulnerability to a disaster. Elements which can reduce risk are the knowledge of physical, sociocultural, political, and economic environmental features. Through this knowledge, communities are able to systematize a series of preventive measures. Such measures may include workshops, a simulation of evacuation procedures, or an orientation for heads of families in how to build firm structures which will be resistant to disaster impact. *One of the most important issues in preparedness and mitigation is that all women should receive complete non-formal training on the activities that need to be performed in the aftermath of a disaster.* Women need to be motivated to efficiently participate in all phases of pre-disaster. For example, the community associations could provide emergency plans, evacuation procedures, shelter locations, food depots, alternate sources of water, and elaboration of risk maps. Women should be in

charge of organizing to meet basic needs such as food, basic services supplied to the house, and building safety.

The community, through family units, needs to be fully aware of first aid, evacuation from the house, hygiene and safety procedures. It is also essential to communicate in advance the locations where basic articles will be made available to the victims of a disaster. *Women in leadership roles should contact key persons or institutions immediately after disaster occurs.*

During the relief phase, women should be encouraged to mobilize themselves spontaneously. This mobilization serves as an essential measure of solidarity for stress relief. Women should be encouraged to establish mechanisms to enhance and efficiently direct these manifestations of solidarity to other victims. Such mobilization is directly related to community disaster mitigation measures under traumatic events.

In collaboration with the community, women could be responsible for water distribution. Due to the scarcity of resources, women could be better employed in practical jobs rather than in the deployment of vaccines to the victims. Adequate information and training is the key to successful intervention in these new roles for women.

Community mobilization through women and youth

Women and children in emergencies live a marginal existence. *The only sustainable manner for disaster victims to overcome their marginal condition is through an adjustment process of empowerment, allowing them to fulfil their basic human development needs.* In these circumstances, empowerment would enable women to increase their human and economic developmental goals as defined by their families and communities. It is advisable to channel resources, facilitate training, and reorganize communities through the active participation of women and youth in development programmes. Through their participation in planning, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, the processes of recovery and reconstruction can go beyond the provision of basic needs. Their participation may engender a level of community cohesiveness and security, with greater potential for realizing development goals (see Logarta, 1989).

It is advisable to organize and implement community measures that do not violate the stability of the family structure. For example, a group of women could be taking care of the children, while others concentrate on the immediate needs in an emergency. Such training should take into consideration the multiple roles and long work-day of women.

Promotion of institution building

Even before the occurrence of natural hazards and conflict-induced displacement, some type of community development activities take place within the villages, towns and cities. Often, recognized and registered women's clubs and associations and youth projects with a wider

community empowerment focus are in place. *When disasters strike, associations for women and youth often collapse.*

During the recovery and developmental phases following disasters, some activities are resuscitated. *Supporting the sustained development of people's projects, both morally and materially (particularly for training and retraining programmes) constitutes an essential part of institution-building.* It is wise to search for the hidden resilience displayed by communities affected by disasters, then to build upon it. This would entail a conscious strengthening of local knowledge and wisdom, applying appropriate solutions to crises. One goal should be to increase economic possibilities that promote political, social and economic empowerment of communities wherever possible, without introducing externally-generated institutions.

Sustainability of intervention

A thorough methodology should be developed to assess vulnerable groups and their degrees of vulnerability. This assessment can be accomplished by distinguishing each group's ability to recover from disruptions due to disasters. It is imperative that assistance programmes identify, plan, implement, monitor and later evaluate the impact of these assistance packages on the beneficiary communities. The intent here is to separate those forms of assistance provided to able-bodied vulnerable men from those which are offered to other vulnerable groups, including women and children in emergencies (see Anderson, and UNHCR Senior Coordinator for Refugee Women, 1991).

For the long-term development of displaced communities, projects should integrate physical infra-structural improvements with socio-economic development. Physical improvements undertaken by the community, with the concerted mobilization of women and youth, might include housing construction, provision of water and sanitation, or cultivation of vegetable gardens. These improvements could serve as a frame for increasing skills, providing opportunities for income-generation, and culminating in the empowerment of vulnerable groups and the wider community. Furthermore, other intangible benefits would ensue, such as the awareness of and gratification from immediate results, and confidence in the abilities of women, children, and the wider community to come together to work for socio-economic and political empowerment (Anderson and Woodrow, 1989).

